La Vita Nuova

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La Vita Nuova

by raiast

Summary

After an interesting weekend in Baltimore where Will became quickly acquainted with one Hannibal Lecter, Will moves on to finish out the last five weeks of his contract with the carnival. Five more cities and then he gets to return to Baltimore to live in the lap of luxury as Hannibal's kept boy. Simple, right? Except he's got a fan in the company that's not happy to see him go, a pseudo-sister with problems of her own and on top of all that, there appears to be another killer out there that's gunning for Will's boyfriend.

Sometimes Will misses the days where all he had to do was stack milk jugs into a pyramid.

- This is a sequel to Ball Toss -

Notes

Edit: I probably should have noted you may want to read Ball Toss before this. Perhaps it's not strictly necessary, but it's backstory and smut so...win/win?

Because I have no self-control, my random cracky carnival AU is now a 2-part story with no end in sight. Enjoy.

This chapter is extra long because honestly I just kinda kept writing and then realized I was at like 7,000 words and never really found a place where I wanted to snip it. Oh well.

Chapter 1

Will is drowning.

It should be a rather terrifying concept, were it not for the man that was his demise; crashing over him again and again and Will can scarcely take in one solid breath.

He's pressed into the mattress by the solid form above him, writhing expertly to apply friction in all the right places, stealing the breath directly from his lips. Will arches up into his anchor, pleads with every spare breath ceded to him for more, *more.*

Hannibal is waves and tide and undertow.

He wants to drown.

For every inch he steals from Will's lungs he gives back tenfold, sinking into the depths of him. When he finally affords a chance for air he goes on to steal Will's ability to breathe all over again by whispering hot against his lips, his throat.

You are beautiful. You are wonderful. You are mine.

Even as he drowns Will can feel the crescendo building within him, the whole of his body singing in response as the forte rises, crests--

An insistent, rhythmic buzzing jerks Will from his slumber, and for a moment all he can do is pant into the sweaty pillow beneath him. Soon enough he realizes that there is, really, only one person that would be calling him. Only one that he cares about, at least. He throws his arm out to pick up the buzzing phone from the nightstand beside him, swiping to answer the call just in time.

"'Lo?"

A pause. "You were sleeping." The voice, similar to the one in his dream but so much better for it being reality, sounds regretful at the statement.

"Dreaming of you," Will replies as he stretches out, attempts to ignore the very prominent evidence of his lovely dreams. "This is better though."

"Is it?" Hannibal inquires.

"S'real," Will explains, pulls the phone away from his face as a yawn rips through him. "Real is better. How was the opera?"

He can hear the soft sound of Hannibal's hum before he answers, his sleepily aroused body remembers suddenly what that sound feels like against his skin "It would have been all the more lovely had you been with me."

Will gives a breathy laugh at that, ignoring the extra pull of blood to his traitorous dick. He presses a hand down on his groin, though it does little to stem his arousal. “I remember a bit of Creole, but not nearly enough to understand an opera. Italian is right out.”

“The mark of a good opera is being able to understand the story even if the words are foreign,” Hannibal argues softly. “I’ve no doubt my clever boy would have been able to follow along.”

Heat rises in him at the statement, his stomach clenching and his dick giving a twitch to remind him that it hasn’t been seen to yet. Will gives a small sigh, turns his hand from chastisement to encouragement as he slips into his boxers to give his length a short stroke. He can’t stop the strangled sound that rattles from his throat, and Hannibal’s low chuckle in response only makes him harder.

“Is my sweet boy seeking release?”

“*Yes,*″ Will answers on a breath. “Dream you is just as persistent as you you; I woke up rock hard.”

“Lovely,” Hannibal breathes. “Touch yourself for me, darling. Nice slow, long strokes.”

A low groan of annoyance rumbles from his throat. “*Tease* myself, you mean,” he corrects.

“Yes,” is all that Hannibal affords as a response, and Will shudders, obeys; keeps his grip only tight enough to be felt, too lose to afford the friction he craves, too slow to set off the chain-reaction that would tumble through him like dominoes falling as he reaches climax. “It hardly seems possible that it’s been less than two weeks since I last saw you. The time feels shorter and longer all at once.”

“I miss you,” is all that Will can manage.

“The feeling is mutual. Have you settled into Syracuse alright? All set to begin tomorrow?”

Will’s pace falters at the change in topic. He had been expecting phone sex to be a bit...sexier. “Yeah. Though you didn’t have to call ahead again for the room. Isn’t that what the money was for?”

“Don’t stop,” Hannibal cuts in sharply, and Will nearly moans at the command. How the hell he knew Will’s attention had been divided he could never know, but the fact that he did, that he called him on it, has Will close to release already. When he is sure Will has taken up his task again, he continues. “Use the money for something else. Or save it. Throw it away, if you want; I don’t care.”

Will gives a low groan at that, accentuated when, on an upstroke, he brushes his thumb over the head of his dick, smearing the precum that beads there. “You’re even richer than I thought, aren’t you?” he has to ask, though it matters little to him either way.

Another low chuckle that spreads from his phone’s earpiece through every nerve in his body. “Oh, darling, you have no idea.”

A gasp seizes his throat, his hand picking up speed instinctively as his stomach thrums with desire. This is not the kind of person Will is; he has never once let someone's wealth determine *anything.* Not their desirability, not their power over him, nothing. But for some reason, considering Hannibal this way makes him feel...powerful. Powerful by proxy. Because if Hannibal holds the power and Will is all that he wants then Will must hold some power as well. "Tell me," he bites out, relieved when Hannibal doesn't reprimand him his increased pace.

"Let me put it this way," Hannibal purrs after a moment of contemplative silence. "Had you not agreed to return to me, I should think I would have purchased the company and shut down the carnival."

"Giving me no other option," Will pants; he's working his cock desperately now, his balls tightening in anticipation of release. "Do you really think that would have been enough? That you'd have shut down my only line of stability and I'd have come crawling to you, begging you to rescue me?" It's a wonder Hannibal is able to understand him at all, what with the shaky, breathless syllables that shudder from his mouth.

"Oh, sweet thing," Hannibal intones with amusement. "My darling, headstrong boy. I know you would have."

Will comes at that, but forces down his cry as he does so. If Hannibal wants to be all cocky, *fine*, but Will gets to choose exactly how much of that he feeds.

"Good boy," Hannibal purrs, and Will can't hope to quell the whimper that squeaks out, continuing his strokes long after his release has finished spilling until he's shuddering uncomfortably under his own hand. He wishes it was Hannibal's.

"I don't want to do three more weeks," Will whispers when his breath finally returns to him. "Four, really, by the time I make the drive back."

"It will go quicker than you might imagine, darling. And I will always be available if you need me."

There is silence then, while Will allows his pulse to slow, his breaths to even out. There are a dozen things he could say at the moment, but he finds that none of the words will come to his lips.

"Go back to sleep, Will. You've a new city of wretched souls to pass judgement on tomorrow. May your magnets hold well," he blesses him, and Will gives a breathy laugh.

"Goodnight, Hannibal."

When the line cuts and his phone screen lights to show that the call has ended, Will abandons it back on the nightstand. He curls up onto his side, unmindful of the sticky release that is cooling in his boxers, and grabs at the secondary pillow on the double bed, clutching it tightly to his chest, wishing that it were firmer, warmer, with just the right amount of thick, silver hair…

Business is good. There seems to be plenty of young college students that are more than happy to take a break for the weekend to visit the carnival in town. More than a few of said students are foolish boys with inflated egos that are more than happy to pass some cash to Will in an attempt to impress the girls that gaggle alongside them.

Now and then, Will takes pity on the young souls.

There are more than enough dickheads that pass through--there always are. They will throw a fuss when they don't manage to get all the bottles down (ironically, and to Will's vast amusement, many times this happens even when he does not have the magnets activated) and either threaten Will or demand their money back (usually both). Sometimes they won't even be patrons of his, just visitors to the carnival that are happy to tear down the life he has chosen because they view it as lesser to their own.

Will has his veritable pick of the litter--but in two weeks he has yet to deem someone worth his time. Or, rather, he has yet to feel the twist of desire to act on snuffing out any number of appropriate targets. Somehow, it just doesn't seem worth the effort, not as fun, without Hannibal by his side. And, though it had never been a concern before, since Baltimore Will has a hard time with the concept of wasting good meat. He is neither skilled nor knowledgeable enough to pull the feat off on his own. And without Hannibal's knowledge of anatomy and freak sense of smell, he has no way of knowing if something is truly safe to consume.

All of these factors have led to Will quickly growing bored, longing for the company of his--he still shivers at the qualifier--*Daddy.* And though he is eating better than ever, now that he is staying in hotel rooms with kitchenettes and can purchase actual groceries for the week (without counting dollars and cents to boot), Will is *hungry.* It's a twisted sort of hunger that he knows he will never be able to sate himself. A hunger for what only the man back in Baltimore can provide him. For the man himself.

"Will."

Will blinks, his attention drawn to the opening of his booth, where Matthew leans across the counter. He moves from the corner he was leaning against to close the distance between them. "What's up?" he inquires, though he's sure already that he is not going to care about what Matthew has to say regardless.

"It's Sunday night," Matthew tells him, and Will blinks, lifts one thick eyebrow to impart to the boy across from him that he's well aware of what day it is. "You haven't radioed me about anyone."

Will gives a shrug, glancing around to confirm that foot traffic is dying down. He begins his nightly routine of packing up the stall. "So?"

"So?" Matthew repeats. "So you didn't radio me about anyone in Pittsburgh, either."

He can't help the snort of amusement that is pulled from his throat. "You pick pockets, Matthew. You hardly need me telling you which mark to go for. If you want to work, work. I'm not stopping you."

There's a moment of tense silence, one which Will pointedly ignores as he begins to pull down the prizes that hang along the window of his booth.

"Maybe I'm not interested in doing it without you on the other end," he finally states, his tone soft and, to Will's consternation, vulnerable.

"*You* were doing *me* the favor, Matthew. You don't need me for this." Will freezes in his routine when Matthew hoists his weight up onto the counter and slithers into the booth, pressing closer to Will.

His dark eyes are hard, lasered in on Will's with an uncomfortable level of intensity. His thin lips twist into a knowing smirk and he leans in close, breathes against Will's ear, "People are less likely to complain about having their wallets lifted when they're dead."

Will's blood runs cold and he twists his head instinctively to meet Matthew's cold gaze, regrets the movement immediately when it draws their lips only inches apart. "What are you talking about?"

The smirk shifts to a sneer, to an outright grin. "Don't play coy, Will. I know what you've been doing to all those marks you deemed worthy of knocking down a peg." Will remains silent, frozen, though his mind is racing at the implications. Matthew shifts forward and Will forces himself to remain still when their lips brush slightly as he speaks again. "I followed you," he breathes, "in Shreveport. I saw what you did to Peter Jacobs. And I wondered...does he do this with all of them? Turns out, yes, you do."

Shreveport. That was months ago--nearly half a year.

He doesn't mean to--truly he doesn't--but Will's eyes flick to the far counter where he's left his switchblade. Matthew follows his gaze, gives a soft chuckle. He pulls away slightly, smirks up at Will when their eyes meet again. "If I wanted to turn you in I'd have done it months ago, Will. Same as if I wanted to blackmail you. I just want you to know that you're not alone--don't have to be."

Will stares at the young man before him wondering how, with his natural talent for reading people and the countless opportunities he's had to hone that skill over the years, he didn't see until now how deep the darkness in Matthew ran. He knows he's not alone--he has Hannibal. But Will doesn't think it would be wise to tell Matthew that.

"Have you ever seen the way that smaller birds will mob a hawk on a wire?" Matthew asks, perhaps mistaking Will's silence for confusion. "Enough of those smaller birds get together, and they chase the hawks away. Imagine if the hawks started working together."

"I know what you're trying to say," Will says at last. He fights the temptation to let out a sigh. Happy but distant is going to be a thing of the past, he suspects, but there's no getting around that now.

“But?” the lean man prompts, sensing correctly that Will has more to say.

He does sigh then, rests a friendly hand on one slim shoulder as he slides away from the confinement of the counter at his back and the boy at his front. “But you’re not a hawk, Matthew. And I’m not interested.” Will turns his back on him, ill-advised, perhaps, but he’s confident in his own capabilities should his admirer decide to strike. He continues with shutting down his booth and if his routine draws him closer to the counter where his knife sits, well that’s just fine.

“I’m sorry,” he says softly to the silence around him. And he means it. Perhaps, if he hadn’t met Hannibal, things would be different. Perhaps he could have taken him on, though he is sure that Matthew would always be looking for more than Will would be willing to give.

He spares a glance over his shoulder, but Matthew has already departed. He must have more natural talent than Will assumed, if he was able to crawl back over the counter and stalk away from the booth without making a sound. Will makes a mental note of the skill and reminds himself to stay vigilant in the coming weeks. Just in case.

The lamb turned out beautifully, and he is quite pleased with the new sauce recipe he tested, makes a mental note to add it into his rotation. The roasted potatoes have just the right amount of seasoning. The Bordeaux he has picked to accompany the dish is fruit-driven and leads smoothly into prickly, savory, mouth-drying tannins; it is the perfect pair.

The lighting is low, intimate. Čiurlionis’ Prelude in D minor trickles softly through the speakers, flowing, calming.

It’s not enough.

Hannibal stares at the empty seat across from him as he chews his bite of lamb (though it is so tender it actually requires very little chewing). He realizes how silly it is, how imprudent, possibly ill-advised. Hannibal is not one that is prone to flights of fancy, nor whirlwind romances, nor allowing attachments of any significance to form. He spent what, all hours totaled, barely amounts to one full day (and much of that time sleeping) with the rude, scruffy-faced, flannel-clad stranger. And yet...

And yet he misses the boy terribly.

The phone calls help, for a time, and Will is more than happy to pass the days with texts that range from seeking distraction to complaining about the weather to downright scandalous comments of a sexual nature. Hannibal usually receives the latter right before a patient arrives and must then spend the next hour quelling the arousal that simmers in his core as he fantasizes about the contents of said messages. All while simultaneously feigning interest in whatever his patient is droning about across from him and doling out appropriate, therapist-like responses.

They have Skyped a few times, though Will’s laptop is ancient and the webcam quality abhorrent. Hannibal has already made a note to have the thing replaced. But it is nice to see

Will's face, see his eyes sparkle and cheeks flush when Hannibal compliments him. In the end, though, Hannibal misses his presence. Misses the smell of him, all musk and spice, misses the taste of his mouth, his skin, his come. Misses the way the boy quakes under his touch as he comes undone.

After dinner, Hannibal does the dishes and contemplates his options. It doesn't take him long at all to decide what to do. One phone call to the hotel he's arranged in Albany has Will upgraded to a king-sized suite (he adores the boy, but he won't give up the comfort of space by squeezing into a double with him if he doesn't have to) and ten minutes on his tablet has him booked on a flight out Saturday morning.

He talks to Will that evening as they both prepare to retire. He can tell that something is eating at the boy, but Will doesn't offer so he doesn't ask. He considers telling Will of his impromptu weekend plans but decides, in the end, to surprise the boy instead. Perhaps he'll make a point of picking up a new laptop this week to deliver to his lover. All he needs to do to cement the decision is think of Will surprised, flustered but grateful, blushing furiously as he accepts the gift, thanks Hannibal.

Perhaps he will call him 'daddy'. Hannibal is beginning to like that.

Albany sucks.

The heat wave seems to be following him from city to city, because the temperature is a stifling ninety degrees with eighty percent humidity index and Will is fairly certain he'd sell his soul for a stiff breeze. He normally just keeps water on hand but with no way to keep it cool it's doing little to aid him, so Will decides to be proactive and cuts a deal with the lemonade stand nearby to pay an extra five dollars on each refill as long as one of the employees delivers it over to his joint.

Not only is he sweaty, uncomfortable and irritated, but he's also bored as all hell. The fish aren't biting here and while he doesn't have the added stress any longer of fretting over lack of income, it also means that he has little to do other than stand around in his booth and try to reel in business. Perhaps they can tell that his heart just isn't in it, because his normally confident, charming self is being ignored like a bum on the street seeking bus fare.

The fair-goers aren't the only ones ignoring him. He hasn't heard from Hannibal all damn day. Granted, the man has his own life, but he's usually got a lot more down time on Saturdays to help keep Will entertained.
The only good thing about Albany is that Matthew has been ignoring him since their last night in Syracuse, so at least he doesn't have to worry about that. He tells himself that lack of presence isn't something he should worry about either, though he has a strong suspicion that he's not dealt with the last of the young man; he's likely just off tending to his wounded pride. Matthew doesn't seem the sort that is easily brushed aside, especially given what he revealed he knows about Will. More than once Will has wondered if it wouldn't be prudent to just take care of the situation before his contract is up but every time the thought begins he ends it by reminding himself that while the kid is a nuisance, he's not really done anything to justify losing his life over.

Will leans against the corner of the window, body twisted so he's mostly in the shade of the booth, not that it does much to help. He pulls out his phone for the twentieth time that day and is so busy frowning at his lack of notifications that he doesn't notice someone has approached until a bill is slapped down onto the counter beside him.

Will startles at the sudden sound, eyes darting to the hand that holds down a five dollar bill, follows the arm up to the gorgeous man it's attached to, gaping.

"Five dollars, I believe it was? I'd like a go."

Will can't help the stupid grin that splits his face. "What are you doing here?!" He has the sudden, inappropriate urge to hurl himself across the counter and into the man across from him.

Hannibal casts a knowing smile at him, leans closer over the ledge between them. "I found myself with a free weekend and thought I'd give it another try before you close up shop for good," Hannibal purrs, nods his head to where he knows the basket of balls is to remind Will to retrieve them. "I am, after all, fairly confident in my abilities."

Will's grin twists to a smirk. "Are you now?" he challenges, plucking up three of the softballs and setting them before his customer. He pulls the five from beneath Hannibal's hand and makes a show of holding it up to the sun to inspect that it's real. He shoots his customer a playfully suspicious look but nods, stepping out of the way of the target.

He doesn't have the magnets activated and Hannibal gets it down in one.

"Congratulations," Will laughs, stepping back up to the window, nods to the stuffed toys suspended above them like mistletoe. "Care to pick your prize?" His stomach drops when Hannibal's eyes darken.

"I'll take the one in plaid," Hannibal purrs, leaning over the counter between them. Will meets him halfway, can't help but let out a sigh as their lips slot together. For all the desperate need, the naughty texts and calls between them the last few weeks, the kiss is surprisingly soft, intimate. A promise of what's to come. Will sighs again when they part, though neither pull back.

"I missed you," he breathes, his eyes, half-lidded, slip closed again when Hannibal presses forward again.

"And I you, sweet boy," Hannibal murmurs against his mouth.

A low whistle drags their attention from each other to a newcomer and Will's cheeks flame with a blush. He's not exactly used to public displays of affection (or any affection at all, really). The shock, the elation, of seeing Hannibal had Will momentarily forgetting where he was. He glares at the ill-timed guest, though as per their previous arrangement she is right on time.

"Friendly here in Albany," the brunette quips, her blue eyes scanning over Will's lover appreciatively.

“Abigail,” Will grits out a greeting, reaches for the cold cup of lemonade currently sweating in her hand. “How much extra not to bring this back to Gemma’s booth?”

The young girl grins, eyes flashing between the two men once more and she purses her lips in thought. “Another five ought to do it,” she decides. Will reaches for his lockbox to draw out some cash, but Hannibal has already pulled out his wallet, passes a twenty over to her with a wink. “Thanks!” she chirps, “See you in two hours!” she calls back to Will as she skips away.

“Precocious thing,” Hannibal muses softly as he watches her retreat.

Will nods. “She’s a sweet kid. New to the circuit, so still optimistic, full of big dreams.”

“Young,” Hannibal notes, turning back to him.

“Signed her contract the month she turned eighteen. She works at the lemonade stand down the way,” he lifts the hideously yellow cup in his hand as evidence, pauses to take a swig of the gloriously cold beverage. “Got to talking to her a few months ago during breakdown. Something going on with her folks, or her dad, I think; drove her away.” Will shrugs. “She seems to fit in here.”

“This is something of a haven for the wayward, isn’t it?”

Will gives a somber chuckle at that; he’s not wrong. “Pretty much, yeah. Not a lot of people join the company running *to* something.”

They stand together in silence for a moment before Will nods his head at his lover. “I see we’ve decided to dress down today,” his lips quirk up into a smirk as he studies Hannibal’s simple (yet, somehow, still refined) outfit of charcoal slacks and an aubergine button-down. He’s not even wearing a tie.

Hannibal gives a soft hum, reaching down to straighten one of his cuffs as if any piece of him could be out of place. “Yes, well. *Someone* informed me that a three-piece is inappropriate attire for a carnival.”

Will grins, sets his cup aside and leans over the counter once more. Suddenly he wishes the man across from him was still dressed to the nines; he’d have liked to tug him closer with his hundred dollar tie. “Didn’t work,” Will informs him softly. “You still look as though you’ve stepped out of a catalogue.”

A pale eyebrow twitches with interest. “Is that so?” he asks, shifting forward ever so slightly. Still not close enough.

Emboldened, Will reaches out to hook a finger into the waistline of Hannibal’s trousers, urges him forward. “Mhmm,” he confirms, brushing their lips together, “and I’m not talking JCPenney.”

A tingle shoots down his spine when he feels Hannibal’s lips curl into a smile against his own. “What a relief,” he intones before sealing their mouths together in a proper kiss. After one wonderful, heart-stopping minute, he pulls away completely. “I rather think I should go

before this ends with the two of us in a very compromising position, you wicked boy. It's not as though we can have a repeat performance at four in the afternoon."

Will's cheeks heat at the reminder. He very pointedly does *not* look at the wall next to him. "I'm shutting down early today," he declares. "No one is playing, anyways."

Hannibal smiles at that and Will's gut clenches. "Lovely. I'll be back at the hotel. Is seven a reasonable time to expect you for dinner?"

Will nods, his mind suddenly reeling dizzily at the concept of getting to spend the evening with his lover. "Perfect."

Will makes an earnest attempt at calling in players for half an hour after Hannibal leaves before he (easily) gives up and (gladly) shuts down his booth for the day. He stops off at Gemma's to let Abigail know he won't be needing any more refills.

The brunette does her best (and fails) at hiding her smirk at the news. "Heading out early?"

Will shoots her a stern look. "I might be up for the same deal tomorrow, if this heat doesn't break," he tells her, pointedly ignoring the inquiry. "I'll let you know."

"Sounds good, Will," she says airily, turning away from him to help a real customer. "Have a good night," she calls after him, actually manages to keep her suggestive tone down to a minimum.

He makes it back to the hotel by a quarter after six, greets Hannibal with a kiss as he dices potatoes at the counter and then retreats to the bathroom, desperate to refresh himself with a cool shower. He emerges twenty minutes later, scrubbed clean and clad only in a towel, sighing as the cool air from the unit near the window blows over his still damp body.

"I feel like a new person," he declares, sidling up to Hannibal, who is now tossing the contents of a small frying pan at the stove.

"Thankfully, you still appear to be Will Graham," Hannibal tells him, diverts his attention from the food for a moment to indulge Will in another kiss. "I'm finding that I quite like Will Graham."

Will blushes at that, saunters away to put on some pants when his dick gives a twitch in his towel.

"There are some clean clothes for you hanging in the closet," Hannibal calls out to him as he makes his way to the duffel bag in the corner chair. His pivots on his feet, drawn to the closet instead.

"Hannibal." Will says when he slides the door back. Hannibal gives an inquisitive hum. "This is way too many clothes."

“Hardly,” he argues. “You’ve another three weeks on the road yet. You could do with a little variety.”

Will gives a huff as he pulls a pair of folded black slacks as well as a gorgeous cobalt blue dress shirt from their respective hangers. “If you expect me to cart all this along you *have* to know that it’s all getting stuffed into my duffel. Think of the wrinkles,” he laments as he steps into the trousers. Hannibal murmurs something that sounds akin to ‘I’d rather not’, but otherwise doesn’t respond. He catches sight of himself in the mirrored door at pauses to appreciate the look. He’s really not one to have ever concerned himself with smart outfits, or worried about how he appears to others, but he has to admit: Hannibal has a talent for it. He looks *good.* He combs his fingers through damp curls, attempting to brush them to the side and out of his face.

He’s just about to close the other side of the closet door when he spots the box on the floor. “Hannibal...what’s this?” he questions as he picks the mysterious package up, though he already has the answer he seeks as he stares at the picture on the outside.

“Hmm?” Hannibal spares a glance over his shoulder, spots the box in Will’s hands. “Oh. I brought you a new laptop. Your current one is dreadful.”

Will stares at the box, well aware that the laptop Hannibal selected is the newest model, top of the line. Easily over a thousand dollars. He sets the box down on the bed and crosses over to the kitchen area. Before he can even open his mouth, Hannibal is speaking again.

“I’m afraid your veto has no power here, Will. If you are going to be continuing with your classes you will need a computer that doesn’t freeze and crash if you run more than two programs at once.” When Will remains silent, his argument very effectively beaten to death, Hannibal sets down the spatula in his hand and turns toward him.

Will’s breath leaves him as Hannibal erases the few inches left between them, reaching up to card a hand through his still-damp curls. When he reaches the back of Will’s skull he guides his mouth forward and Will goes happily, his lips soft and wanting under Hannibal’s. His other hand has found Will’s hip and both hands tighten as Will begins to pull back.

“I’ve given you a gift, Will,” Hannibal points out in a murmur against his jaw. “What do you say?” he prompts.

Will flushes, but his face isn’t the only place his blood flows to; his dick twitches with interest once more, a pleasant buzz tingling down his spine. He gazes up at Hannibal, wide-eyed; this close he can see that flecks of maroon dot his amber irises like blood spatter. “Thank you, Daddy,” he whispers, and Hannibal gives a contented hum, brushing their lips together one more time before pulling away.

“You’re quite welcome, Will,” he replies lightly and Will fights the scowl that threatens to overtake his face when it appears that Hannibal is continuing on as if that exchange hadn’t affected him in the least. A thrum of terror pulses through him when he considers that maybe it hadn’t. Maybe he is the only one that is affected at all--

Hannibal steals his breath with an unexpected kiss, his tongue plundering Will's mouth as though he were searching for gold. "Tempting boy," he growls lowly, nipping at Will's lower lip as he pulls away. "Step away now, before I forget all about dinner and take you to bed. There's wine," he nods to the table against the far wall, where two chairs have been placed. A simple pair of candlesticks burn warmly in the center.

"What, no skulls and flowers?" Will jests as he pours himself a glass of the red.

"One makes do when one must," Hannibal replies solemnly. "Thankfully, there was at least a decent butcher in the area."

Will takes a seat and sips at the red, surprisingly fruity, as he waits for Hannibal to finish. Before long, Hannibal is plating their dinner and joining Will at the table.

"Pan-seared duck breast with cherries and sherry sauce, crispy potatoes and frisée salad," Hannibal announces as he sets down their dishes.

Will huffs with equal parts amusement and disbelief. "Only you could take a bag of groceries and a hotel kitchenette and produce a five-star meal," Will praises softly. He moans around his first mouthful of duck. "I can't wait to come home."

The sentence slips quite thoughtlessly from his lips and both he and Hannibal seem to freeze in the same instant. They both draw their gazes up from their plates until they each meet the other's eyes through the flickering of the flames between them. When Hannibal's lips curl into a small smile, Will feels as though he can breathe again.

"That makes two of us," his lover states softly as he slices off another bite of meat. Will warms at the declaration.

They eat their (delicious) meal, and after Hannibal fills him in on the banal goings-on of Baltimore, Will decides it may be prudent to tell him about Matthew. And he does tell him--everything; that he was the employee he had the arrangement with, that his interest in Will has grown to less-than-professional levels in recent months, that he knows what Will is, what he does, and wants to partner with him.

"I haven't told him I'm leaving yet," Will admits as he leans back from his empty plate and takes another sip of wine. "He's going to find out eventually, and I know it will go over better if he hears it from me and not through the grapevine but…"

Hannibal tilts his head as he swirls his wine beneath his nose. "Have you considered--"

"Yes," Will cuts in. "Yeah, I have. I just...He's just a kid, yet, you know? And I think I have a pretty good read on him. He's not the sort that's going to get spiteful and go to the authorities over all of this. If he's a threat at all it's going to be to me directly and if that's the case then I'm not really worried about it."

"When the hunter casts a net over the mouse and the tiger, the mouse slips free whilst the tiger is slain." When Will only blinks at Hannibal his lips twitch into a soft smile and he elaborates, "You shouldn't underestimate those you consider smaller than yourself, nor the

value they may hold. The mouse may have chosen to gnaw the tiger free, had he considered him a friend."

"You think there's a way to salvage the situation?"

Hannibal nods sagely, finally takes a sip of his wine. "If there is I trust you are the one to find it."

Will gives a hum, drains the rest of his glass. "I don't want to talk about Matthew anymore," he declares.

"Oh?" Hannibal's pale brow quirks with interest. "What do you wish to talk about instead?"

Will pushes his chair back and stands, brings his hands up to begin unfastening the buttons on his shirt. "I don't want to talk at all," he rasps, and *that* catches Hannibal's attention. The man rises, begins on his own shirt as he steps closer to Will.

"My darling boy," he purrs, leaning in to nip at Will's lip. Will nips right back.

"I have been dreaming of you," he admits, "aching for you for three weeks. We've had our talk," he points out as he drops his shirt to the ground, moves forward to begin working open Hannibal's belt and trousers. "We've had our dinner," he pushes the article of clothing down as soon as it proves loose enough, his hand drawn to Hannibal's crotch like a magnet, cupping and fondling his burgeoning arousal with a groan. "I'm ready for dessert," he purrs, and Hannibal steals his breath by striking out serpent-fast to hold Will in place and plunge his tongue into the depths of his mouth.

Hannibal sees to the last of his clothing, guides him back toward the king-sized bed, pushing the laptop box still sitting on it to the floor and out of the way without a second thought. "On the bed, you wicked boy," he commands against Will's mouth, drawing out a moan. "On all fours for me."

Will obeys without a thought because, really, he can't see how this situation can't play out in his favor. He clambers up onto the middle of the bed, positioned on his hands and knees, his rear facing Hannibal, and waits with anticipation. Hannibal is impossible to predict, and he wonders whether he's going to retrieve some sort of lubricant to work him open with his fingers, or perhaps only spit upon his dry hole and force himself in as he had the first night they'd met; Will's head is spinning with possibilities and fantasies.

Apparently his imagination is not as colorful as he thought, because the last thing he expects is for Hannibal's strong hands to grasp his ass firmly and spread him open, making room for the impossibly hot, wet tongue that laps over his puckered hole.

Will spasms and jerks, makes a terribly embarrassing noise in the process. Hannibal continues on in his ministrations as though this were an everyday affair, and before long Will is melting into the sensation, rocking back for more. At some point he's dropped from his hands to his elbows, but the position proves to be more stable so he hardly has reason to complain about it.

And Hannibal continues, alternating between wide, wet licks and sucking kisses. At one point his speared tongue actually breaches Will's loosening hole and the resulting sound that rips from Will's throat is obscene. Quicker than he can understand, his cock is firm as steel, dripping copiously to the mattress beneath him. Will finds that he can rock back into Hannibal's curling tongue, but nothing he can do will provide any friction to his aching cock. As soon as he thinks to move his hand, Hannibal reaches forward to slap it away. Will gets the message clearly, though he doesn't particularly care for it.

"P-please…" Will gasps finally, "Inside, *please, Daddy,"* he groans.

It seems he managed to utter the correct password, because the instant the syllables drop from Will's lips Hannibal rears back with a growl and lines himself up, pushes in until he's buried to the hilt--

And Will comes. Just feeling Hannibal sink into him for the first time in weeks has him coming. It's a blessing, a relief he accepts with a breathless laugh, and possibly the worst thing he can do. Because soon enough the bliss, the warm buzz from his orgasm, will fade, his body with become oversensitive, almost painful with stimulation...and Hannibal is only getting started.

His lover stays still as Will clenches around him, a calm, soothing hand stroking up and down his spine. "My sensitive boy," he purrs, pulling out and pressing back in fully with an agonizing slowness once Will has calmed. The glide is smooth, feels incredible--Hannibal must have lubed up his cock while his tongue was busy assaulting Will. "I *have* missed being buried inside you, darling. So hot and tight for me. Perfect."

All he can do is clutch at the duvet under him and whimper as Hannibal moves behind him, a litany of praise falling from his lips. It's too much, every brush against his prostate (and Hannibal is sure the strike the area with every thrust) pulls a keening whine from Will's throat as his body spasms in protest. And it's not enough, the pace Hannibal has set steady, not nearly fast enough, rough enough. So even though Will feels like collapsing into a sobbing heap every time Hannibal moves, he finds himself rocking back to meet his thrusts. His face buried in his arms, Will begins a soft chant with every push.

"What's that sweet thing?" Hannibal asks him after a time. "Did you need something? Speak up."

Will lifts his head, "*More*," he moans weakly. "Please...harder," he begs, and Hannibal obliges, snapping his hips forward with so much force that Will slides up the bed; firm hands on his hips are quick to drag him back. "*Faster*," Will pants, and Hannibal's pace increases two-fold. "Oh, God, *yes*," he whines as Hannibal ruins him.

"Such a good boy," his lover praises him in a pant, and hearing Hannibal--perfectly put together Hannibal--breathless from the exertion of fucking him sends Will's mind reeling, "taking Daddy's cock so well. Such a needy thing. Do you want to come again, darling boy?"

Will can only whine in response, amazed to find that his cock is beginning to fill out again already. Hannibal has got to be an aphrodisiac personified or something, because there has not been one sexual encounter that Will has ever had that comes anywhere *close* to

comparing to his experiences with Hannibal. “Yes, yes, yes,” he realizes he is chanting with every powerful thrust that bottoms out inside of him. “*Fuck,* Hannibal, I’m--”

So close, so so close. His stomach buzzes and clenches, his balls tighten in preparation for another release, his leaking dick throbs and aches and Will knows that *one touch*, one touch is all he needs.

“I’m going to come.” Despite their track record, it’s Hannibal who announces it, and hearing the words roll out in his thick accent is what pushes Will over the edge with a cry. “*Yes*, Will,” Hannibal hisses, his rhythm faltering and then stilling as he spills into him with a groan. “You clench so beautifully around me, squeeze out all I have to give--”

Will gives a shuddering gasp and keeps coming and *God* it feels as though he’s been coming for ages. Eventually his spasming dick calms, the room comes back into focus, he becomes aware that he is heaving for air and feels as though he’s receiving none of it. Hannibal doesn’t move from where he’s buried inside him, merely wraps his arms around Will and tips them onto their sides. He doesn’t even realize he’s shaking until Hannibal’s arms wrap tighter around him and pull him back against his chest.

One hand finds his hair, brushes it out of his face before sliding softly through his damp locks. He doesn’t shush him, but lets out a low, comforting sound against Will’s ear and then nuzzles into the hair there as well. “You are magnificent,” Hannibal murmurs into his neck. “What a magnificent boy I’ve found.”

Will squirms in Hannibal’s grasp until his softened cock slips out of him, turns over so they are chest to chest. He tilts his face up, nuzzling against Hannibal until the older man grants him a soft kiss. “Thanks. For being here. This is...it’s really good to see you.”

Hannibal presses their lips together once more and then guides Will’s head down to tuck comfortably against his chest. “It was truly my pleasure, Will.”

Will sighs into his chest, wiggles a bit more to erase the scant space still between them, tangling their legs together in the process. He is sweaty and filthy and sated and happy, and as his eyes grow heavier, begin to slip shut, he thinks that Albany isn’t really so bad after all.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Things get real with Hannibal, Will makes a new friend.

Chapter Notes

Well, it's officially not crack because I just spit out a crazy serious chapter without even meaning to.

I'm taking liberties with Abigail's character because, honestly, I'm not a huge fan of her on the show. And since she hasn't gone through that trauma I imagine that she would be very much like any other eighteen year old. She's basically my fill-in for Bev, since Bev as Will's BFF is my favorite thing but I'm probably gonna need her at the BAU later on.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The rest of the weekend passes in an odd combination of timeless whirlwinds (when Will gets to see Hannibal) and absurdly stagnant stretches wherein time stands still (pretty much the whole of Sunday, knowing that Hannibal is waiting for him at the hotel). But those two nights with Hannibal...a peek, perhaps, into what his life will be like when he walks away from the company. Amazing food, incredible sex and the pure, unmistakable feeling of belonging. Belonging with someone, for someone, to someone.

It’s a feeling that is entirely new to Will, having had in the whole of his life only one other person that ever gave two shits about him and then losing that person when he was seventeen. There is still a part of him that believes that all this can’t really be happening; part of him that is waiting for the other shoe to drop. He still wonders if he will come out on the other side of this alive. If, when it ends, he Will be able to piece himself back together afterwards. Because it’s sure to end at some point, right? How likely could it be that this hastily constructed relationship that they’ve formed is the be-all, end-all for both of them? He resolutely pushes aside these doubts when they float to the surface of his mind. After all, Will has already committed to the jump which is, arguably, the hardest part. All that’s left to do is fall.

Hannibal makes it so easy to fall.

Monday morning finds the both of them in bed, tangled together and sharing soft, sweet kisses. Hannibal has a flight out scheduled for mid-morning and Will is determined to eek out every minute of company he can. When Hannibal attempts to rise to see to breakfast, Will

denies him, tugging him back down to the mattress needily and spreading his legs in invitation.

“Three more weeks until I’m back in Baltimore,” Will reminds him softly. “Make me remember what it’s like to be full of you.”

His lover gives a low growl and settles over Will’s body, his lips mapping out every inch of his upper body they can reach as he pushes into Will. He’s still slightly loose from when they had woken and gone for another round in the middle of the night, still slightly slick inside with lube and come. Despite his request, Hannibal does not set a grueling pace nor move into Will roughly. He does not bite and claw at his tender flesh, determined to leave marks (though there are plenty scattered over Will’s pale skin from the last few days).

He slides into Will slowly but fully, his hips rocking into Will like soothing waves that rock a boat, and he slides his fingers through Will’s tangled curls, down his jaw, across his parted lips as he gazes down at him in adoration.

Will can’t breathe. He desired to be full and suddenly he is--too full. Too full of emotions he hasn’t let himself feel in years, expanding in his chest and making his heart ache, his lungs seize. Too full of Hannibal, physically, mentally--for the first time since they met he finds it difficult to keep the man’s gaze and he’s forced to squeeze his eyes shut for fear of drowning in the older man’s desire, admiration, hunger.

Hannibal dips his head down, and it’s not until his soft lips brush along the damp tracks on his cheeks that Will even realizes tears have begun to slip from his closed eyes. Words are being murmured as lips caress his cheeks, soft and foreign; they have a calming effect, though Will couldn’t even say what language is being whispered to him. When his lips glide over Will’s, breathe against his mouth, “Let go, love,” so gently, Will comes with a cry.

He jerks against Hannibal and is immediately wrapped in a firm, comforting embrace. More foreign words fall into his ear as Hannibal buries himself in Will one more time and comes. When he can feel the release finish pulsing inside of him, Will pushes Hannibal away and struggles to sit up dazedly.

He scrubs at his wet eyes, irritated (embarrassed) and bewildered. “What--” he clears his throat when the word is croaked out thick with emotion. “What the fuck was *that*?” he’s asking himself more than his lover, though Hannibal surprises him by having an answer ready.

He gives a soft hum, reaches forward to brush the hair out of his face. “Your mind is a marvel. I’ve suspected since I met you that you were able to assume the point of view of anyone--suspected it was why you have such a knack for charming your patrons, why you find discourteous behavior as unforgivable as I do,” he’s gazing at Will again in *that* way--the way that makes him feel like he is the world--and Will averts his eyes, staring at the soiled sheets beneath them. “Pure empathy,” Hannibal breathes.

“I don’t...that’s never happened before. I...I guess I’ve always kind of known. What people want to hear or...or what kind of people they are--” he gives a considering grunt, “Matthew surprised me recently, I guess. But I’ve never…” he risks glancing back up to Hannibal,

relieved to find only curiosity and patience in his amber eyes. “It’s like I slipped inside,” he admits softly. “Like I was you. And I could feel--” he breaks off the train of thought, glancing away again.

Hannibal makes a soft, discontented sound and reaches up to cup his cheek, guide his chin back around; Will keeps his eyes lowered regardless. “I imagine you’ve always kept a tight rein on your control, until now. I’m afraid I may have overwhelmed you, Will. I apologize.”

Will shrugs his shoulders with a snort. “It’s not *your* fault I’m a freak.”

The hand on his jaw tightens--almost painfully so--and hauls him forward until he is falling against Hannibal’s firm chest, his mouth captured in a bruising kiss. “Never,” he growls against Will’s lips, crashes them together again, “Don’t *ever* consider yourself less than what you are.”

Will trembles against Hannibal’s chest, his hands clutching at the man’s shoulders as he pushes closer, climbs into his lap. He can feel Hannibal’s release slipping from his hole, his own release is painted across his stomach and chest; neither of them pay the mess any mind. “What am I?” he breathes out.

Hannibal’s hand slips into his hair to keep Will’s mouth against his own; his other arm wraps around his waist. “You are incredible, Will. Vicious and beautiful. You are perfect and you are mine.”

He wants to point out that they’ve only known each other for a matter of weeks, have only spent a handful of days together in the flesh. Of *course* Hannibal thinks so highly of him--he doesn’t know him yet. They are, for all intents and purposes, still in the honeymoon stage of their relationship. He hasn’t had enough time to let Hannibal down yet, or vice versa.

Instead, he sighs against Hannibal’s mouth, slips his tongue across soft lips to entreat entrance once more. Hannibal’s hands move down to tug at Will’s legs until they are wrapped around him and then he shifts on the bed, twists them around and suddenly they are standing, and Will is being carried toward the bathroom. Hannibal’s mouth breaks away from his own only long enough for him to look down to get the shower set appropriately and then their lips are back together, breathing in only each other while hot water rains down around them.

Eventually, Will allows his grip around Hannibal’s waist to loosen, drops his legs to stand on his own, though he doesn’t move an inch away from his lover. They wash each other with slow, soapy caresses and Will is certain that he has never felt more content.

Somehow, Hannibal makes it to the airport for his flight and Will finds himself back at the fairgrounds to break down his stand. He’s in an odd sort of mood; content for having spent the weekend with Hannibal, yet mournful at his departure, and still quite unsure how he should be feeling about what had happened when they were having sex.

He’s so sick of being caught in his own head that he’s actually relieved when Abigail comes by under the guise of lending a helping hand, though he knows that she is likely only there to

give him a hard time about what she saw the other day and dig up as much information on the subject as she can. He wonders if Hannibal's twenty was enough to silence her or if she ended up running her mouth to Gemma and the other girls anyways.

She takes up the task of inventorying and packing up the remaining prizes and is content to do so quietly for almost a full ten minutes before she heaves a sigh. "So?"

"So what?" Will snipes back as he disassembles one of the walls, though he's sure he knows what's coming next.

"So...are you going to tell me who he is?" When Will grunts back that he's a friend, the brunette purses her lips. "Yes, I can see by your neck that he's very friendly indeed. So who is he?"

Will's cheeks flame and he ducks his head, though the marks that line his neck are impossible to hide, especially with the way the top two buttons of his shirt are open. Honestly it's so hot that he would have shucked the entire thing by now if it weren't for the even more damning evidence that covered the rest of his torso. He uses his sleeved arm to wipe at the sweat on his forehead, stepping away from his work to retrieve a water. "I met him in Baltimore," he relents finally. "We had a good time. He...came to visit."

"Must have had a *very* good time, if he's flying out to the likes of Albany just for some tail," Abigail notes as she turns back to the clipboard in her hands, and Will chokes on his sip of water. Even with her head ducked down to read, Will can see the smirk on her lips. "Okay, it's fun to give you a hard time, but, really, it's not something to be embarrassed about. Hell, I almost feel like I should congratulate you. It's not every day you find sex that good. I know *I'd* hop on a plane if there was a sure thing waiting for me--"

"Stop, please," Will raises a hand, turns away from her and busies himself with work once more. "I really don't need to hear this."

His helper gives a snort that is somehow both amused and disdainful. "You sound like my father. Never willing to admit that I'm not a little girl anymore."

"Most fathers don't care to hear or think about their daughters having sex no matter *what* age they are," Will informs her; pauses for a moment, "And the ones that do usually end up in jail."

"*Gross,* I didn't actually talk to my dad about *sex.* It was just...*anything* that reminded him I was growing up. Taking my driving test, getting a cell phone...going off to college… Will, I had to run off and join a *carnival* just so I could feel like I had some independence."

Will gives a grunt as the section of wall he's working at breaks apart, dragging the weight of it until he can drop it on top of the growing pile on the ground. He retrieves the staple gun and attaches his booth number to the corner of the fallen piece. When he's done, he heaves a sigh and walks over to Abigail, draining the last of his water as he goes.

"Do they know you're here?" he asks softly. Abigail's gaze doesn't lift from the clipboard, but the knuckles gripping it have gone white. "Does anyone?"

She's silent, still, for a long moment, and then all at once she's moving, back to where she left off with her count of the prizes. When she speaks, her tone is airy. "I'm eighteen. A legal adult. You can't be classified as a runaway if you're eighteen."

"But you are one," Will fills in. "Abigail--"

"He never touched me," she clarifies, spinning around to face him. She's upset, angry and brokenhearted, but she's not lying. "He has this…" she swallows hard, her doe-eyes blinking furiously as tears threaten to collect in them. "It was like an obsession. And it scared me, but it wasn't sexual."

"Okay," Will agrees. "It's okay," he tells her, and he's not sure if he's telling her that it's okay to be angry or hurt or scared, or if it's okay that she ran from it, or if it's okay that she obviously doesn't want to speak on the subject anymore. It's a blanket 'okay' he decides, when it appears the word has calmed her. Her shoulders slump as the tension leaves her, the wetness that threatens her eyes dries up.

After a moment of tense silence, her lips pull into a quivering smile. "Is the sex pretty good though?"

"Hopeless." Will declares as he turns his back on her. He can't stop his smile, though, at the sound of her giggling behind him.

They take a break for lunch and Will insists on leaving the fairgrounds to get some *actual* food, rather than rely on the few food booths that stay open for the employees that are breaking down the site. Abigail insists that it's not necessary until Will reminds her that a restaurant means air conditioning, and then she's more than happy to tag along.

They end up at a smaller, local place that boasts about their amazing pie, and each get a burger and fries with some ice-cold sodas. The fries are greasy, the burgers are greasy, Will is willing to bet the *pie* is greasy. It's the kind of food that would make Hannibal grimace and somehow tastes all the better for being paid for with his money. It's perfect.

They left the serious air of tension back at Will's site, Will grousing that their young, male server granted Abigail more fries and making a game of sneaking one from her plate to his own every time she looks away (which is often, as the male server in question seems to be to Abigail's tastes). In between coy glances, fluttered lashes and mouthfuls of burger, Abigail is happy to fill Will in on the gossip of the grounds. Gemma, the owner of the lemonade stand that Abigail has served at since she joined the company, is herself a frightful gossip and Will can see why the normally finicky woman has kept Abigail under her roof for so long. The pair of them probably do little more all day than squeeze lemons and trade secrets (other people's secrets, of course).

"Wait, I thought *Kennedy* was seeing Marcus," Will interjects into Abigail's story of the, apparently, very public break-up of Marcus and Melissa.

Abigail snorts into her glass as she takes a sip of Coke. “*Kennedy* is seeing *everyone.* Or *any*one, I should say.”

“Ah,” Will nods as if he should have known. In truth, he doesn’t really give a rat’s ass who is sleeping with whom or what crazy thing the woman from the frozen yogurt stand has said now. But Abigail makes the information fun. She definitely knows how to tell a story. “So Melissa found out about Kennedy, then.”

“Mm,” Abigail grunts around her mouthful of fries, shaking her head. “*Marcus* found out about *Liam*.”

“Not Liam from the *milk* booth?!” Abigail nods her confirmation as she sinks her teeth into her burger. “Gross.”

Little as he cares about gossip, or whatever twisted ‘office politics’ that go on in the company, nearly everyone agrees on one thing: the milk booth people are... Well, 'odd' would be a polite way of putting it. Will would say that they are the creepiest bunch of fucks he’s ever had the displeasure of meeting. He goes the long way around to the restrooms, just to avoid passing by the milk booth.

He sighs, pushing his plate away as he leans back, full and content on his side of the booth. Abigail eyes the fries that he’s abandoned. Will smirks, pushes the plate closer to her still. “Go ahead, most of them are yours, anyways.” Her grin makes him grin. “I wish we had gotten to know each other sooner,” he broadcasts the thought without meaning to.

Abigail shrugs. “We’re friends now,” she states as she scoops the fries from his plate to her own. “What’s it matter?” He wants to say it doesn’t, but he knows that’s not quite true. When he doesn’t respond, she glances up at him.

Will licks his lips, pulling in a deep breath. “You might as well know. I’m sure Gemma will have the news around half the grounds by the time we get to Concord. ...I’m leaving,” he tells her, glances from the frown her features are twisting into to look out the window next to them instead. “I opted out of renewing my contract this weekend. I’m finishing out Concord and Portland, and then I’m done.”

“What will you do?” she asks softly.

“I’ve been working on taking online courses the last few years, slowly-- *very* slowly. I’m going to go to school full time, really work on getting it done. After that...I don’t know.” He considers continuing for a moment, watches a crow picking at something along the side of the road across from the small parking lot of the diner. “I’m going back to Baltimore,” he announces finally.

“To be with…”

“Hannibal,” he supplies, and just saying the man’s name pulls at the edges of his lips. Christ, he has it bad.

“Are you happy?”

The inquiry pulls his gaze back to the young woman across from him. The first person in his twelve years with the company to declare themselves his friend. The frown that he had glanced away from is no longer there; in its place sits curiosity, hope.

“Yes,” he whispers, and his heart beats faster.

Abigail’s lovely, freckled face splits into a grin, her blue eyes lighting up at the declaration. “Then *I’m* happy. I mean,” she scoffs at him, rolling her eyes. “You have shit timing, but I’m happy for you.”

Will is happy that she’s happy. Even happier because he can tell that she genuinely means it.

All at once, her hand is outstretched over the table, palm up. “Phone,” she declares. Will blinks at her, and she makes an insistent beckoning gesture. “Give me your phone,” she orders again. “If you’re leaving me, you’re at least going to stay in touch.”

“I’m not the greatest when it comes to staying in touch,” Will warns as he digs in his pocket and passes his phone off to her.

“Don’t worry,” she assures him. “I am.” He relaxes back into the booth once more as Abigail sets to work adding her information to his contacts lists. He can’t help but grin when she preens upon learning that she is the only contact under ‘A’. “‘A’ is for ‘Abigail’!” she declares.

Will’s attention is back on the scene outside, his eye caught by a hawk that sits solitary upon the power lines across the street.

“Uhh, Will?” her tone is worrisome, pulls Will’s gaze back to her. “Please tell me you don’t have your father’s phone number listed under *‘Daddy’* in here.”

Her cheeks are stained red with a blush, her lips pursed tightly to withhold her laughter. Will feels his own cheeks flush. “My dad’s been dead for twelve years,” he bites out, because he doesn’t even *begin* to know how to explain what she’s found.

“Thank God,” she sighs, handing back his phone. “Because he just sent you an *incredibly* inappropriate text message.”

He’s ripped the phone from her grasp before she’s even finished speaking, his flush spreading down to his neck and chest as he sees that message preview that scrolls along the top of his phone notifications. He opens the text, dutifully avoiding Abigail’s eye.

Already I ache to be inside you again, lovely boy. I should think I would like to feel you within me, as well. Set up your laptop tonight. Skype with me. I would like to see you come for me.

“Fucking Hell,” Will mutters as his blood flows further south.

“*Right*?!” Abigail agrees. “Get it, Graham.”

Will glares at her, stuffs his phone in his pocket and pulls out his wallet to leave a few twenties on the table. “Time to get back to work,” he declares firmly.

The brunette gives him a look of utter despair, obviously regretting teasing him. “No pie?” she questions in disbelief.

“No pie,” Will confirms.

Chapter End Notes

Spoiler alert: Will buys Abigail a slice of pie to go.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Will does a good deed, deals with a bad egg

Chapter Notes

This is short. I know that it is. But it's published, which was my main goal.

Honestly, I struggled a bit getting this out, having been distracted by random other works and now I've been pulled back into Tristhad and there is a very real possibility of me starting a past lives Hannigram/Tristhad fic, because I DEFINITELY don't have enough stuff to concentrate on right now.

Friendly reminder that I'm on tumblr now, because apparently that's a thing I'm doing.

In the following two weeks, Will and Abigail become fast friends. They don't travel or lodge together, but Will finds a friendly hand for every set-up and breakdown. And, during the long stretches of the days that the carnival runs, when Abigail gets to take her break she first hits a food stand and then appears at Will's joint while she eats her meal.

Will quite enjoys her company. He views her as something akin to the little sister he never had; protective of the girl, but willing to get into mischief with her as well. When she announces to him in Concord that she managed to score a fake ID, Will doesn't protest the morality of the situation, but insists on accompanying her to whatever bar she decides to go to so that he may keep an eye on her. When he learns that she has forfeited her lodging stipend to pay for gas and an oil change, Will brings her back to his hotel and sets her to bed while he takes the settee in his suite. She argues the kindness, drunkenly and with slurred words, but in the end realizes that Will is not going to allow her to sleep in her car in the state she is in.

He awakens long before she does, stiff from his time cramped onto the small couch, but a hot shower is nearly enough to work out the soreness in his muscles. As the water pours down around him he recalls Hannibal's clever hands manipulating his muscles into pliancy in a warm bath and his hand is working his cock, now just as stiff as his shoulders, before he even realizes he's doing it. He squeezes his eyes shut and lets Hannibal's voice flood his mind, replays the heated texts they sent to each other last night before sleep finally took him. He bites the knuckle of his free hand viciously as he comes in an attempt to remain silent.

He has dressed and is in the process of cooking breakfast when Abigail stirs, stumbling first from the bed into the bathroom, then into the kitchenette. Will passes her a cup of coffee silently and she thanks him with wide, bleary eyes.

“Ready to throw out that ID?”

Abigail groans in response, scrubs her face with her hands and takes another large gulp of coffee. “You didn’t have to let me drink so much,” she mumbles back.

Will can’t help the smirk that tugs at his lips. “How else would you learn?” When she doesn’t respond, he glances over to her. “Just promise me if you use it you’ll be safe. If someone wants to buy you a drink, you watch the bartender make it. Don’t leave your drink unattended, *ever*--”

“Oh my God, Will, I’m eighteen, not an idiot,” she interrupts with an exaggerated sigh. When Will only purses his lips in response, glares at the eggs in the pan before him, she gives a softer sigh, places a hand on his forearm. “Thank you. I’ll be safe.”

“Breakfast is ready,” he responds, “Go sit down. *You’re eating*,” he insists when she lets out a groan of disgust. “It will help, trust me.”

They eat their bacon, eggs and toast in silence, Abigail much more slowly than Will. He fights a grin as he watches her, her beginner’s inexperience a novelty to him. Before he became ill, his dad drank enough to pass on all the secrets to Will before he even started. Sure, he’d experienced a particularly bad hangover a time or two, but it was always due to intended overindulgence during particularly dark times.

“Go take a shower,” he instructs when he can see she’s stomached her last bite of eggs. “Fastest way to feel human again is to wash it off. You’ll have to make due with the clothes you’ve got.”

She nods and departs with a zombie-like shuffle to the bathroom. Will takes the opportunity to pull out his phone and text Hannibal.

Good morning. He begins simply. He’s delighted when he receives a reply almost immediately.

Good morning, darling. How are you today?

Will’s chest swells at the term of endearment, though it’s hardly the first time Hannibal has used one.

Feeling my age nursing a hungover youth back to humanity. Makes me wonder how I ever made do on my own.

Simple. You are a remarkably resilient creature.

And you are a flatterer. Will shoots back with a blush. He stares at his phone for another minute before he finds the nerve to type out the next message.

~~*Listen, I want to do something, but I'm not sure if I'm allowed*~~

~~*Abigail is a good kid. I want to help her out*~~

~~*We weren't exactly close before, but now I feel like I'm abandoning her and I want to*~~

Every text he begins and then deletes, unsure of how he's supposed to word this. Or if he's supposed to at all. He glances toward the bathroom door; the shower is still running, so it seems he still has some time…

He places the call.

"I'm sure you're desperate for my voice, but I'm afraid I can't speak for long--" Hannibal begins.

"I want to give Abigail money," Will blurts out, though he rushes through the thought so quickly that it takes Hannibal several moments to separate each word to discern their meaning. When it takes him a moment to respond, Will starts again, "She's a good kid, and she's using her lodging stipend just to keep her car moving. I can't--" he takes a deep breath, hoping that Hannibal understands. "I don't want to leave her alone. With nothing."

"Will."

"Since you've been setting up the hotels I've pretty much only been using that cash you gave me for groceries--"

"*Will*." He remains silent, allowing Hannibal to continue. He realizes with chagrin that he's holding his breath, and his heart itself seems to be avoiding pumping until Hannibal tells it it's okay to do so. "How much is left?" Will hardly understands the question for a moment, and Hannibal repeats it. "Of what I gave you, how much is left?"

"Thirteen-hundred," Will replies in a breath. All at once he is fearful that Hannibal will be displeased that it's so little, displeased that it's so much.

"Is it enough?" his smooth voice cuts through Will's panicking thoughts.

"Is it…?"

"Is it enough to help her, leaving enough to get you back home?" There is no judgement in Hannibal's voice; he is simply looking at logical facts at the moment.

Will considers the question. He knows, having been in Abigail's position at an even slightly younger age, that even a few hundred dollars would make all the difference in the world. Would be the difference between sleeping in a car and a bed, eating soggy sandwiches from gas stations and eating your fill at a diner. A few hundred would get her by, but he wants to do more than that.

"No," he declares finally. He cuts off the beginnings of Hannibal's response as to how much more he needs, "Two thousand should do it. Get her on her feet and provide my groceries and

gas for the next few weeks." He tries not to feel ashamed at the request, reminds himself that Hannibal wants this for him, suggested it.

"I have an appointment this morning, but if you text me your account information I should have enough time to get it wired to you now," Hannibal tells him. Just like that. No balking at the amount, nor what he wants to use it for. Pure acceptance. Will's heart, just moments ago hesitant to do its job, begins to race.

"I will. ...Thank you, Daddy," his cock throbs at the utterance, a Pavlov effect if he ever saw one.

"Will," Hannibal's voice catches him just as he's about to end the call. "You don't have to say it every time," he informs him.

Will's breath catches as his response flits through his mind a moment before it falls from his lips, "I like to."

"Well. If you like to," Hannibal concedes, his tone implying the unspoken 'by all means'. "You should see the funds in your account within the hour."

"Bye, Daddy," Will breathes. "Have a good day."

"You as well, sweet thing." Even hundreds of miles away Hannibal has impeccable timing; he ends the call just as Abigail opens the bathroom door. He logs into his account to screenshot the necessary information and sends it to Hannibal before he greets her.

"Ready to head back?" She's still blinking at him blearily, and he moves back to the fridge to grab a cold bottle of water to push into her hands. "You're lucky Gemma doesn't need you for breakdown. I guarantee you I'm a lot more forgiving. I may even let you coast today."

In all honesty, Will doesn't truly need her assistance. But she had pledged it to him regardless the night before--long before she became too inebriated to know what she was saying. All the same, her company is a distraction and a comfort, and he needed to ensure a moment of privacy for what he was intending to grant her.

He sets her to work on inventory again, as she had helped in Albany, while he gets to breaking down the booth. He lets the morning pass in a sluggish, heat-soaked daze before he finally pulls her aside.

Hannibal, true to his word, had made the funds available to Will immediately. He was able to hit up the ATM stationed at the fairgrounds to withdraw the extra bit of money he needed to add to the cash on hand. Abigail wasn't sure to accept it, but he didn't intend on leaving her much of a choice.

"Let's take a break," he suggests when the sun begins to beat down in earnest. He hands Abigail another cool bottle of water and pulls her aside, back into the privacy of what

remains of his standing booth. “Alright, here’s the thing,” he announces as soon he is certain he has her attention. “I don’t want you working week to week. It’s no way to live.”

He pushes the roll of cash into one of her hands, uses his other hand to close her fingers around it as she gapes up at him with uncertainty. “Will…”

“Take it,” he urges softly. “Trust me, I don’t need it.”

“I...I can’t--”

“You *can*,” Will assures her. “Trust me. I accepted the kindness of a stranger once and it...it changed my life.” He couldn’t tell her if it was for the better or not--he didn’t yet know himself.

But he has a pretty good feeling about it.

She surges forward then, throwing her arms around him and squeezing tight. Will can’t stop the laugh that breaks loose from his chest as he stumbles back a step to keep from tipping over. She presses words into the shoulder that her face is buried into, and Will think it sounds something like a muffled ‘thank you’. “Just be safe,” he requests. “And smart. Don’t go flashing that around and get yourself mugged.”

Abigail pulls back with a laugh, shoving at his shoulder in a move of vague annoyance to indicate that she doesn’t appreciate him thinking her so foolish. She’s just tucked the money away safely in her pocket when they are joined by a third. Abigail’s blue eyes flick from Will to the newcomer and back again, and before he even turns around he already knows who it is.

He glances behind him, schooling the annoyance out of his expression. He’s been waiting for this since Syracuse, and he’s not at all surprised that it’s finally happening. “Hey, Matthew,” he makes his voice light, keeps his gaze trained north of the boy’s bare shoulders. It seems that Matthew has finally had it with the heat, having stripped out of the top half of his sanitation jumpsuit and tied the arms around his waist to keep the bottom half up. Will’s not going to do the other man any favors by letting his eyes roam.

“Will,” he greets, and it’s obvious that he is attempting to keep his tone light as well (and failing spectacularly). He doesn’t even glance in Abigail’s direction. “Can I talk to you for a minute? In private,” he adds, the only indication that he has noticed Abigail’s presence at all. He’s probably not happy to see Will accepting help for someone during breakdown, he himself having attempted to fill that role unsuccessfully multiple times before.

Will holds back a sigh and nods, knowing that he will likely not be able to avoid this altogether, so they may as well have it out now. He turns back to Abigail, pulling a ten from his wallet and slipping it into her hand. “Why don’t you grab us a couple of corn dogs?” She nods, accepting her dismissal with an indifferent maturity. She knows that Will will likely tell her what’s going on when she returns anyways...he may have had a few things to say on the subject of Matthew Brown the night before after one or two whiskeys himself.

His instinct is to turn away, go back to work so he has something to occupy his hands, his eyes; since that morning he slipped into Hannibal’s mind he finds eye contact just a little bit

more intimidating. He decides, ultimately, so show his former associate some respect and turns his attention to him fully. If his gaze falls closer to the man's shoulder than his eyes that's his own business. He doesn't speak, expects that Matthew is more than willing to get the ball rolling. He's right.

"Heard the news," he announces, as though this is supposed to be some great shock to Will. The word of his departure has been public knowledge for over a week now; he'd have been more surprised if Matthew *hadn't* heard. "Finally hitting the road? Or, stepping off it, as it were."

Will gives a shrug, folding his arms across his chest. "Time for a change."

Matthew gives a nod at that, as though he understands entirely what Will means. He begins to pace around the remnants of the booth. "I didn't realize you were so unhappy with the company."

He doesn't follow, doesn't even turn his body to stay angled toward his visitor. "I'm not unhappy with the company, I just think there may be other places I could be happy as well."

"Like Baltimore?"

His eyes narrow at that, and he does turn to face Matthew once more. *That* is information that Will is surprised he has. He's not mentioned his next destination to anyone other than Abigail, and he's fairly certain she hasn't been running her mouth on the subject--not even to Gemma. A dozen responses flit through Will's mind before he discards each and every one of them. In the end, he settles on remaining silent. Better that he doesn't open his mouth and confirm anything that he doesn't want confirmed.

Matthew smirks at his silence, and the sight sets Will's blood to boiling so quickly that he pulls his gaze away quickly--up to his dark eyes. Cold, calculating. Will wonders again how he didn't see it before. Matthew doesn't *scare* him, certainly not, but he should have realized sooner that he's dangerous all the same. "Do you think he can make you happy?" he's asking as Will blinks, pulls his gaze to the wall next to him.

"He already does," he snaps back against his better judgement. This is not going how it should; Will should not be entertaining this conversation at all. "You had your opportunity, Matthew," he's continuing, and the reasonable, logical side of him is locked away to watch through his own eyes as Will's body, quite of its own volition, mind, pours gasoline on the dumpster fire that is this exchange. "Took it, even. And I wasn't interested. It's time to move on."

The young man snarls at that, lips twisted and teeth bared like a rabid dog as he stalks closer to Will, doesn't stop until he's breathing in his face. "You didn't even give me a chance to be what you wanted," he hisses. A moment later, he's taking a deep breath, reigning in the cold fire that was previously spitting from his eyes. "I could have helped you kill those marks," he points out, and though he speaks softly, inches from himself; Will finds his eyes darting to their surroundings, ensuring their privacy. "I would have fucked you in your booth, if that's what you were after."

It takes Will a moment to process what exactly that statement means, his mind whirring when it does trying to figure out *how*... Matthew must have been nearby that night, probably stopping over to invite Will for a drink. He must have heard them. It doesn't matter in the least, but Will finds himself wondering how much he listened to. He obviously knows that the man he was with was also a killer. Did he hear Hannibal declare that he had come back in order to dispatch of Will? Did he hear Will cry out as he came at the very thought?

Will's blood runs cold, unease turning heavily in his gut. Did he follow the two of them, snug in Hannibal's Bentley, as they jetted off to procure Tomber just as he'd followed Will previously? He likes to think, if that were the case, that Hannibal would have been aware of a tail; the man was startlingly good at what he did.

"I wasn't *after* anything," he responds at long last, and he's not even sure how much time has elapsed between Matthew's pseudo-question and Will's answer, but it must have been just enough because Abigail--lovely, wonderfully timed Abigail--then returns balancing two corn dogs in one fist and two squeeze bottles of red and yellow in the other.

"I *swore* I'd bring the ketchup and mustard back; don't let me forget," she announces, very deliberately ignoring the tension that thickens the air around them.

Matthew steps back then, shooting Will a look that is obviously meant to ensure him that this conversation is not over. Will drops molten steel into his answering glare, his lips pulled tight to assure him that it is. He's just beginning to entertain the idea of murder again when Abigail pushes a corn dog into his hand.

"I don't like him," Abigail declares in hushed tones as the man in question departs. "He's always skulking around, staring. And not even in a creepy 'undressing you with his eyes' way...more a 'imagining flaying the skin from your body' way."

Will doesn't want to tell her how spot-on she might be. "Just ignore him; give him a wide berth," he advises as he accepts the bottle of ketchup from Abigail and squirts a line across his dog. "Curious, have you told anyone I was heading back to Baltimore?"

Abigail frowns around her bite of corn dog, shakes her head. He didn't think so. He tries not to ruin his afternoon by considering all the ways Matthew may have stumbled across such information.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Will gets back to Baltimore

Chapter Notes

Important(ish) Edit: I initially stated that the last city of Will's tour would be Bangor, Maine. I had no idea how small of a city that was and I need the slight increase in population size and distance to Baltimore, so the final city of Will's tour has been updated to Portland, Maine. I believe I only mentioned this once before and got that changed but if you notice any other references to Bangor in previous chapters please let me know and I will get it updated! Thank you!

To everyone that was thinking this whole thing was moving a bit slowly (but was too polite to say so in the comments): You guys, so many things are happening now. We are literally going like 0 to 100 in about .5 seconds.

Obligatory I'm on tumblr now.

“I just don’t know how I’m going to deal with another weekend with him. I think I’ve successfully pissed him off now--and honestly the feeling is mutual--so I don’t even know *what* to expect. I just--” Will pauses, taking what feels like his first breath in fifteen minutes. When he releases it, his shoulders drop; he wills the tension to bleed from his body further as he listens to Hannibal’s quiet breaths on the other line. “I just realized I’ve been monopolizing the whole conversation with my tirade. I’m sorry. Your turn. How was the hunger benefit thing last night, that performance?”

His heart feels light when he hears Hannibal’s soft laugh at his apology. “It’s quite alright, Will. Though, I’m afraid you may have just opened the stage for my own tirade.”

He can’t help the grin that quirks his lips, deliberately ending the anxious pacing he had been doing during his rant and moving over to the bed to stretch out. “I think I’ve yet to hear a tirade from you,” he points out. “That bad?”

“The soprano was astounding. Truly a talent. I only wish you could have been there to experience it with me as well. And perhaps your presence would have had the added benefit of dissuading one of my patients from approaching me.”

Will grins at that. “The cheese store guy?” With his patient confidentiality Hannibal cannot tell him much, but Will does know some about this particular one. He is the source of great annoyance to Hannibal, which is a source of unending amusement to Will; he would love to witness the neurotic man slowly chip away at Hannibal’s infallible neutral countenance.

“One and the same,” he confirms and actually *sighs*. “The man he was with seemed more than ready to point out my patient’s *true* reason for attendance. All in front of a long-time acquaintance of mine, and a gossip to boot.”

“Clinger has a friend?” Will rebounds, surprised. Without a name, Will is forced to come up with an alias for this man that Hannibal holds so little regard for. He was quick to appropriate ‘Clinger’ to the subject and Hannibal has yet to refute it.

“I’m not sure I’d name him a friend so much as an acquaintance. He appeared wholly neutral to be in this particular man’s presence,” Hannibal drawls, and Will can hear the unspoken ‘and who wouldn’t be?’ dripping from his tone.

It was something that Will noticed early on in their conversations; Hannibal doesn’t seem to have *friends* so much as *acquaintances* or *colleagues*. And, it would appear, neither does this particular patient of his.

“Well it appears that the both of us have had less than stellar weekends,” Will points out and Hannibal gives a soft hum of agreement. Will’s grin turns sly, his free hand snaking down his torso to fondle idly at his crotch. “What’s to be done about that, do you think?”

The next hum that buzzes over the line is of a far different nature.

The drive from Concord to Portland is one of the easiest of the tour, clocking in at just over two hours with steady traffic. In true form, Hannibal has called ahead to arrange his hotel, informing him that he should expect a package delivered to him care of the front desk within a day or two.

Will arrives that Monday and spends his last week in utter relaxation. He orders room service rather than make the trip for groceries (at Hannibal’s insistence). He spends some time exploring the city (which is a rather short endeavor, considering its dismal population of less than 67,000). And every day he checks at the front desk for mail. On Wednesday, he is successful.

The front desk passes over the small parcel gently, the bold, red claim of ‘FRAGILE’ stamped across the top likely lending to their tender touch. Will transfers it with an equally tender touch to his room until he can rip into the thing to discern its contents. Hannibal had given him no hints.

He uses his car key to break the seal across the middle of the box and lifts the flaps to peer inside, a grin stretching his lips and his heart racing. The first thing he does is reach inside and pull out the slip of paper to begin familiarizing himself with Hannibal’s instructions.

The weekend in Portland passes much like every other has for the last twelve years and it's surreal to think that after this everything is going to be different. With the end of the summer looming, foot traffic is higher than ever, especially having extended this last weekend of their northern tour into Labor Day. Will rakes in an obscene amount of cash; an ironic sort of twist considering he cares little about the success of his little game booth these days.

The only thing that is different in the nervous energy that buzzes through him, amplifies with each passing day. Anticipation, excitement, to return to Baltimore--to Hannibal--and to carry out the task he was given. He's already located a few guys in the company that have more time than money and they more than readily agreed to seeing to the dismantling of Will's booth for a handsome sum. Will would not be returning to the grounds tomorrow. With that seen to, all Will needs to do to push things along is make a call.

It's early evening before he does, his procrastination more one of design than reluctance. Once things go, should they go according to plan, they will go until it's done. He needs to be prepared. He unhooks the walkie from his waistband and thumbs down the chat button, proud that his tone comes out as a casual boredom rather than the excited glee that threatens to expose him.

"Can I get sanitation over to 257?" It's a reasonable and logical request, also a code he hasn't used in weeks.

Matthew is the first to respond--he always is. "Yeah, I'm on it," his staticy voice chirps back after a moment. If he is intrigued, thrilled, annoyed or otherwise feels anything by Will's beckoning it doesn't come through over the radio. Much to Will's surprise, the young man had, as yet, actually avoided him all weekend. But he's more than happy to come now.

He arrives within minutes, wearing an expression of wariness more than anything, and Will beckons him in, stepping further back into the privacy of the booth. Matthew slips up and over the counter and follows him, silent.

"I wanted to apologize, for how things have been recently," Will starts, and he can't blame Matthew for the dubious glint that flashes through his dark eyes. "We've never really been friends, but you've been good to work with--you overstepped," he adds, tipping him a 'try and argue with me' look. "You did. But you were also right. I didn't give you a chance."

Matthew seems to brighten at that and Will is quick to quash that hopeful line of thinking that is no doubt streaming through his mind.

"Nothing has changed, I'm leaving tomorrow," he adds quickly. "But I thought, maybe...one more mark. If you want to...you can come with me."

That hopeful spark in his eye shivers, transforms to something gleefully malicious. Thins lips slip into a sly smirk and all at once Matthew is nodding. "Do you have him, yet?"

Will allows himself to mirror his smirk. "Yellow shirt, some band on in, I think. 'Bout 5'10", brown and blue. He was with his buddies, going to head back to the Beer Gardens before

taking off. You should be able to lift the wallet on his way out." He nods, and Will can practically see him committing the details to memory. "Meet me at my car at ten. I'm--"

"I know where you're parked," Matthew cuts in smoothly, dips his head and turns to go. "See you at ten."

Yes, Will thinks, pulls back on his smirk until Matthew has disappeared from view. Yes you will.

Matthew's end must run smoothly because he is sliding into the passenger seat of Will's Volvo at exactly ten pm. He passes over the wallet and Will plugs the address on the license into his phone, more for show than anything, and then begins to drive away from the grounds.

As soon as he reaches the winding backroad that stretches from the fairgrounds to the city proper, Will speaks. "Have you killed before, Matthew?" He doesn't allow his eyes to leave the dark road as he asks the question.

"Not a person," he admits, and it's enough reference for Will to understand him entirely.

"Nervous?"

"Excited," his companion corrects. "...If you'll let me, that is."

Will does glance over to him then, flashes a grin and removes his right hand from the wheel to nudge playfully at Matthew's thigh. "Why do you think you're here?"

It's taken as a rhetorical question, because Matthew doesn't answer. Will doesn't return his hand to the steering wheel. Instead, he lets his elbow sit lazily on the center console, his fingers slipping to the small crevasse between it and his seat, wrapping around the item he'd stashed there an hour previous.

"You're here," Will clarifies, tightening his fingers, twisting his hand into the correct position. "Because I wasn't exaggerating when I told you you'd overstepped, before."

Before Matthew can respond, can truly parse out the particulars of that statement, Will moves into action, swinging his hand up and thrusting the hypodermic needle into the side of his passenger's neck. The plunger has been depressed before poor Matthew truly knows what's happening, and his limbs drop heavily as though someone had filled them with concrete. Before he can even finish his simple exclamation of 'what the fuck', he slips into his temporary oblivion.

And Will--despite the body count associated with him--having never done something even *close* to similar to this, never takes his eyes off the road.

He thinks Hannibal would be proud.

It's an eight hour drive from Portland to Baltimore, and because Will has to take care of a few essential things like ditching Matthew's Corolla and making sure his own tracks are covered, it's ten in the morning before he's pulling into town. He's an odd combination of utterly exhausted and completely wired but, in a manic sort of state only accomplished by chugging three Red Bulls in three hours, Will still decides that it would be a fine idea to stop off for a bottle of wine on his way home.

He takes the opportunity of being stopped in gridlock traffic to pull up the address of a liquor store that is both open and relatively on his way to that place on Bennington Lane that is somehow, now, not just Hannibal's.

He reckons that, after being awake since eight the previous morning and having done more than his fair share of activity in that time, he probably looks very much like the type of person that would be frequenting a liquor store at ten in the morning on a Tuesday. But he has never truly let the opinions of others bother him, so he simply strolls up to the first employee he can find and asks to be pointed in the direction of an extravagantly priced bottle of Aramone. He understands the irony of gifting Hannibal a bottle of wine with his own money, but somehow Will knows that Hannibal will understand and appreciate the gesture all the same.

It's when Will is strolling back to his car that he notices the commotion down the block. Several police cars (lights flashing), black SUVs, and a crowd of lookie-lous gathering around the steps of a prestigious sort of looking building. He stashes his recently purchased bottle in the trunk and meanders down toward the action. He's just reached the base of the steps leading up to the building as a slim woman with a fiery mane of red curls is being escorted from the premises by a couple of Men in Blue.

"I have rights, you know!" she calls after them, but her declaration seems more antagonizing than actually indignant. She's just tugging on the sleeves of her jacket, righting them from the rumpled mess her escort made of them, as Will sidles up next to her.

"What's going on?"

She barely spares him a glance, her face already buried in the digital display of her camera. "The Ripper's struck again," she mutters distractedly.

Will, knowing full well that his roommate, lover and Sugar Daddy is the Chesapeake Ripper, is more than intrigued at the news. He knew Hannibal hadn't been idle all the weeks that he was away, but neither had he indicated that there might be a homecoming present waiting for him. "They said it's the Ripper?" he asks, his head tilting to the officers that have taken up guard duty at the front of the building.

The pale woman gives an amused snort at the question. "They don't really have to. A man with his throat ripped open to expose his vocal cords, cello neck shoved down his throat? Pretty easy to place the local baddie responsible." She finally turns toward him, blue eyes shrewd as though she is suspicious of his interest, though there are more than a dozen other pedestrians that have gathered seeking the same information.

"You get pictures?" he asks, nodding to the camera in her hands.

Her eyes dart up to the officers that had removed her from the scene and she turns her body away from them and nods in affirmation once, then jerks her head to the side to indicate that they should step away.

When they are well away from the steps, she holds up the digital display for him to view. She managed several pictures before her presence was discovered, and she lets Will view each one for several seconds before clicking over to the next. The display is grotesque, intriguing. The pictures make Will wish he could step closer, see the body for himself, run a bow along those beautifully exposed vocal cords…

While she is correct in stating that it looks very much like a scene the Ripper would leave, it feels hollow somehow.

"Are you a reporter?" he deduces. What else would be she, really?

"Freddie Lounds," she responds, extending her hand. Will takes it, shakes it, but otherwise levels her with a blank stare. "Tattlecrime?" she elaborates.

Will can only give a helpless shrug. "I'm new to the city."

She manages a tight smile, though even that seems a bit fake. "I'll give you the rundown, then. The Chesapeake Ripper is a serial killer of the highest order. He's been cyclically active and inactive for years and has never left a trace of a clue for the clueless," her head jerks back to the building full of officials, "FBI to uncover. I report on Tattlecrime dot com, to tell the unedited version of this sort of news. Hi-res photos should be up in an hour or two," she tells him, raising her camera as proof as she begins to step away, "If you want a better gander." The statement is drawled as though it was meant as both an enticement and an accusation.

Will nods, though she's already turned her back to him and begun to walk away. Her mess of curls blows back and out against the wind in a fiery halo, the mess of hair only accentuated by the tight, slim lines of her fitted jacket and skinny jeans.

What an interesting woman.

Having been reared by an abusive, alcoholic father and a weak-willed mother that would sooner turn the blame to her child than take the belt herself, Matthew knew a thing or two about Fear.

Fear was stepping out the front door every morning, usually unwashed and clad in garments so threadbare they barely passed for clothing at all, knowing that he would spend the next six hours being mocked by the other children at school. Fear was a cold peanut butter sandwich and browning apple slices that was the 'poor lunch' served by the school district, savoring every bite knowing it may be the last time he tasted food that day. Fear was the smell of gin, of vodka, of whiskey, and the darkness that took his father's eyes every time he was in its company.

Matthew knew Fear intimately, greeted it like an old friend when it came to visit because it no longer held any power over him. He knew Fear.

He did not previously, he has come to realize in the last twelve hours, know Terror.

He is bound--unnecessarily, in his opinion, as whatever Will had injected him with had him struggling to even twitch a finger--and gagged--also unnecessary as he is so shaken he is sure he could not produce a single sound--and somewhere dark, hot, moving. A trunk, he deduced after a short while, and covered with a blanket, which would account for the darkness and the stifling heat. It makes it even more difficult to breath and he wishes he could shift enough to pull the cover away from his face.

He is conscious for what feels like an eternity, in whole probably a few hours, before the movement stops and the sound of the hatch opening is the only warning he receives before the cover is pulled back and daylight blinds him just as effectively. The slip of a needle, something cold entering him again, and then darkness.

There is movement again, the next time consciousness comes to him, but not for long. The timing is pretty spot on on the dosage of whatever the hell it is that Will has. He remembers, from his research, that his fancy new boyfriend is some kind of doctor. He must have supplied Will with the means to transport him easily. He wants to wonder why but ultimately knows that there could only be one reason. And it definitely wasn't to have him over for tea and crumpets.

The car comes to a stop and then there comes the sound of the car door slamming shut; the resulting rumble shakes through his prone, bound body and somehow manages to awaken every soreness not numbed by the paralytic. Not long after there are voices, muffled to him but clear enough to know that it's Will and his...his foreign *thing.*

The back hatch opens, erasing the barrier of sound.

"Oh, I brought you something!" Will announces, a dizzily happy giddiness in his voice. Matthew hates that it belongs to that man when it should belong to him.

The blanket is thrown off of him and he's not so much blinded this time, as the lighting is low. Garage, he deduces quickly. He blinks up at the two men, instinctively attempting to struggle against his bonds though whatever he is drugged with is still affecting him at peak levels. Neither of the men above him even spare him a glance, Will instead reaching for a bottle of wine that had been abandoned near his feet and presenting it to his...his lover, he makes himself complete the thought. Because that is what he is. That monstrosity of sharp edges and inhuman eyes and thick accents. *He* is Will's lover. Not Matthew.

"Oh Will," the older man purrs and Matthew wants to snarl at the sound of the name dropping from the man's unworthy lips. Who was he, anyways? Someone that Will has known for weeks. He has been Will's confidant, Will's right hand for *two years.* "What a lovely vintage, thank you," the fraud pronounces, and though Matthew squeezes his eyes shut--just about the only muscles he can willfully control--he can still hear the sound of their lips meeting, slow and tender. Will's contented hum is like a knife to his heart.

“Matthew,” Will addresses him at last, his tone almost one of vague surprise as though the presence of him bound and gagged in the back of his Volvo has only now entered his awareness, “You expressed much interest in my partner, so I thought you two should become better acquainted. Matthew, meet Hannibal,” Matthew refuses to move his eyes from Will’s. He will not acknowledge that man; the second he does, the second he becomes *real.* “You may also know him as the Chesapeake Ripper.”

There’s that newfound feeling of Terror again. Because Matthew *does* know that name, knows what becomes of the victims of such a killer. His eyes dart over to Will’s left, and the abject horror in his gut must be prevalent in his eyes because the man that he gazes upon looks positively ravenous at the sight of him.

“We should see our guest to the cellar,” the Ripper points out, and Will agrees with a nod. In the space of a heartbeat the Chesapeake Ripper has moved forward and hauled his frozen form over one shoulder. “Why don’t you get started on your luggage, darling; I’ll see to our guest,” he suggests, and then walks forward to usher Matthew into the house.

“You thought that he belonged to you?” the words drifted to him softly, obviously not meant for Will to hear, “Silly boy, he was mine before he met me. I can’t fault you your desires, nor deny that you’ve good taste, at least,” he continues as he opens a hatch in the floor of what appears to be a pantry and hauls him down the stairs that have opened to them. He pauses at the bottom, flips a light switch to the side of them before he proceeds onward. “He is truly remarkable.”

Matthew is dropped onto a steel table, his host leaving him momentarily and then returning with a pair of shears to slice through his bonds. As soon as his limbs have been freed, they are being stretched, Matthew turned onto his back. There are restraints at the foot and head of the table, he realizes, one for each limb. The Ripper secures each appendage stoically, unhurried. When the last restraint has been tightened, he returns to the head of the table.

“He is remarkable,” he repeats in a murmur, “and he is *mine*,” *that* comes out as more of a growl.

It seems Matthew and Terror are becoming fast friends today.

“Pity that you could have not deduced as much sooner. Had you not thrown such a tantrum at not getting your own way, dear Will would have been more that happy to allow you to continue living.”

“You still down there?” Will’s voice calls from the kitchen. When Hannibal answers in the affirmative, Matthew can hear the pounding of hurried footsteps down the stairs. He was *rushing* to return to his lover’s side and Matthew felt his stomach turn at the concept.

He still cannot move his head in earnest, and from his position strapped to the table he can do little more than roll his eyes along the wooden beams above him. When that grows tiresome he can always close his eyes. He can do nothing to halt his hearing.

Those soft, tender kisses again. Wet. Wanting.

"Fuck, I missed you," Will gasps as the wet sounds continue; his lover is kissing down his neck, Matthew guesses. He's already been presented with the bruising evidence of the older man's affections all over Will's throat, after all.

"And I you, darling boy," the response is slightly muffled, murmured against the soft skin the man is worshiping, no doubt.

Will's wanton groan strikes the air abruptly, strikes Matthew twice as hard. Despite himself, despite the drugs that leave him nearly wholly paralyzed, unfeeling, he can sense his cock twitching is response. Oh, this would be the cruelest torture of all, he wagers. More cruel still than even killing him. To hear that beautiful creature express the pleasure he receives at the hands of another…

"Do you still have lube down here?" It's a gasp, a groan, desperate.

A low chuckle in answer, "Sweet boy," more wet kisses, "I have been preparing for your arrival for weeks. I wager I have stashed lubricant in every room of this house."

The whimper that falls from Will's lips at that sends another pulse of agony and desire to Matthew's traitorous cock. "Fuck me then," Will demands, and Matthew hopes that this killer--Hannibal, his brain supplies, even though he doesn't care to die with that man's name on his mind--he hopes that he understands and appreciates the gift he has been given. Because Matthew would, *especially* at that moment, do absolutely anything to make it his.

He can only lie there and stare at the ceiling (closing his eyes, he had realized quickly, only lent a canvas to imagine the sight that fell just feet from his view) and listen as the two of them kiss, shed clothes, move against each other in that most intimate way. The sounds are wet but rough--brutal, sometimes--and Matthew wishes that he could make his tongue and jaw work for himself so he could tell Will that it didn't have to be like that. That he would worship him sweetly and gently if he were only given the chance.

Will must like whatever it is that Hannibal is giving him, abrupt as it is, because it's not long before he's crying out and movements are slowing and the cloying, pungent scent of sex is filling the air.

They don't even acknowledge him--or what they did just a step away from him--as they gather up their clothes and ascend the stairs. And that, Matthew wagers, is what stings most of all.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Will attends Anatomy and Butchery 101 with Dr. Hannibal Lecter.

Also dinner and blowjobs.

Chapter Notes

To all of you that have decided to follow me on tumblr, like and/or reblog my AO3 works: Thanks, fam ;) <3

Due to the fact that he's been awake going on close to thirty hours (and spent nearly a third of that time driving from Portland to Baltimore), Will is an amusing mix of overly-caffeinated bordering on deliriously exhausted. Hannibal is caught between the desire to feed him and put him to bed. In the end, he settles for a happy medium consisting of wrapping Will up in 1500-thread count Egyptian cotton sheets and curling up next to him to feed him from the fruit and cheese tray he'd assembled while Will took a quick shower.

"I wouldn't have taken you for one to eat in bed," Will murmurs before he leans forward to capture a grape from Hannibal's fingers.

Hannibal selects another for him, his left hand sifting through freshly-washed chocolate curls. His shower only resulted in stripping away the scents of dirt and grease and stale sweat and replacing each odor with Hannibal's soap, shampoo, conditioner. He smells so distinctly *Hannibal* now that the doctor can't help but feel as though he's laid some sort of claim to the boy. Deep in his gut the desire coils, hot and heavy, to claim him further (despite having just buried himself within him less than an hour prior).

"Oh? Why would you have assumed such a thing?" He's completely correct, of course, but Hannibal sees no reason to let Will know that.

Will gives a lazy shrug, hunkering down a bit more into the sheets and pillows surrounding him and eyeing a slice of cheddar pointedly. Hannibal retrieves it for him, pairing it with a slice of apple. "Just seem a bit fussy, is all. I'd hate to offend your delicate sensibilities by leaving crumbs in your bed."

He snatches the proffered bite with a smirk as Hannibal fights a scowl. "It seems you are more than capable of offending them on your own, you horrid thing."

Will's smirk morphs to a grin and he snakes a hand out from beneath the blankets to circle the wrist of the hand still stroking through his hair. He guides it down to rest in the space between their bodies, entwining their fingers together. "Regret my return yet?"

Hannibal leans forward to catch that plump bottom lip of his, sucking it clean of the juice the apple left behind. Oh, but this boy makes him soft; in the span of a month he has grown to hardly recognize himself. "Not quite yet. You should get some sleep."

"Matthew…" Will begins to protest; he's forced to pause when a yawn slides through him.

"Is going nowhere. You need to rest, Will. You'll retain no information if you're sleeping on your feet." And Hannibal intends to teach him everything.

"Will you stay with me?" the question is mumbled heavily as Will sinks entirely into the bed beneath him, his blue eyes blinking blearily as he finally allows his exhaustion to overtake him.

Hannibal moves the tray between them to the nightstand next to his side of the bed and slips beneath the covers wordlessly. Will is against him instantly, both of his arms coiling around one of Hannibal's, his head finding a spot to rest atop his shoulder. He gazes down at the boy for a moment before succumbing to the temptation of slipping his fingers through impossibly soft curls once more. Those curls were a beacon that Hannibal's tactile senses could not refuse.

"I was thinking about having our guest for dinner," Hannibal informs him after a moment.

Will gives a soft hum, but soon enough his brows knit together. He tilts his head up to meet Hannibal's gaze. "Wait, as an entree or as a *guest*?"

"As a guest, of course. What do you think?"

Will's frown deepens. "I think it seems needlessly cruel. I mean...to what end?"

He's surprised to find that he's not disappointed by Will's pushback. He knows it has more to do with Will's empathy, compassion as a whole, and is not specifically geared toward Matthew. "To the end you just described. But if you find it distasteful then we needn't do it."

His heart does not stutter when Will's countenance melts from one of wary sternness to pleased fondness. It does *not.* And he certainly does not release a breath of relief when Will settles his head back down into Hannibal's shoulder and relaxes against him.

"Sleep, Will," Hannibal urges softly, and Will obeys.

"Your knowledge of anatomy is?" Hannibal prompts, hours later after Will has had a sound nap.

"Minimal," Will responds honestly. He can feel Hannibal nod behind him as though this does not come as a surprise. Will tries not to feel offended.

“And butchery?”

Will actually snorts at that. “Non-existent, Hannibal. C’mon.”

His disdainful air collapses in on itself the moment he feels Hannibal’s hot breath in his ear. “I have much to teach you,” he purrs lowly.

Will clenches his teeth against the shiver that threatens to spill down him. “Let’s get started then,” he urges, and he thinks he does a pretty good job ignoring the breathless quality in his voice.

Matthew has, thus far, remained stonily silent, staring pointedly at the ceiling above him even as he lay strapped naked to the table before them. When Hannibal addresses him directly, however, Will can see every inch of the young man coil taut.

“Mr. Brown, I’m going to have to ask you to remain still,” Hannibal instructs, “For the sake of Will’s education. It may prove difficult, but I’m afraid I cannot administer another paralytic. You’ve already been drugged more than I would recommend for the sake of transportation, and further doses would begin to affect the meat.”

Horror, then, Will can see. He seems to be avoiding meeting the gaze of either of them with a fierce determination. He can tell that Matthew is mentally breaking down the implications of that statement. “I’m sorry we can’t display you,” Will apologizes earnestly, and that does draw Matthew’s eye for just a moment. He glances to Will; resentment and heartache seem to be battling for dominance in his dark eyes. “Obviously there’s too much of a connection to you to make that work. Hannibal has incredible talent and intuition in the kitchen, though--any part of you that can be elevated will be; he’ll make sure of it.”

When tears slip from the corners of Matthew’s eyes to track across his temples and drip to the stainless steel table beneath him, Will is pleased to find that he doesn’t feel guilty. He gave the boy every opportunity, after all. If they allowed him to go on he would only prove to be a thorn in their side down the line. At the same time, Will feels no pleasure at Matthew’s distress, nor does he desire to drag this out longer than it needs to be. So, after taking a short breath to steady his voice, he prompts, “Doctor.”

Hannibal folds a scalpel into his hand, guides it to make symmetrical cuts from collarbone to sternum, and then a single slice down the length of the torso. “Steady,” he breathes into Will’s ear. The warm body against his back anchors him to this moment, when Will is otherwise sure that he would float away. “Not too deep through the abdomen.”

Matthew gasps and spasms on the table as the scalpel slices through him effortlessly. When they move to spread the cavity open, Matthew gives a shout and spasms once, then tenses tighter than Will has ever witnessed. His pride will not allow him to show his pain, his weakness, to them at this time. For Will, maybe, he could, but he will afford Hannibal no such victory. Even when Hannibal moves the scalpel inward, instructing Will on the points to dig into to sever arteries and release the liver, Matthew only growls between clenched teeth and pushes his body back into the steel beneath him, refusing to let his agony pulse through him in any physical way.

Will actually respects that, and he suspects that Hannibal does as well. The doctor makes quick work of his lesson in organ extraction, lingering no longer in any given area than he needs to. When the liver, spleen and one kidney have been removed, Matthew begins to spasm beneath them, his body finally giving into the trauma, perhaps simply the blood loss. He twitches beneath them, but the strangled sounds from his throat cease. And not long after, the twitching ceases as well.

If Matthew had had any final words, he hadn't spoken them in front of Will. Will is bothered more by the fact that he isn't very bothered, rather than by the situation itself.

And Hannibal continues on with his lesson as though he is not even aware that a man just died beneath their hands. He is methodical, thorough, and so very proud of Will when he is able to replicate the extraction of the left kidney without guidance. Will feels intoxicated, wonders if he's still a little bit short on sleep or if killing could really feel this much better than all the times he'd done it alone.

Dinner is a quiet affair and, despite Will's assumptions, Matthew is not on the menu. Hannibal has, apparently, had lamb shanks braising for hours. Somehow Will hadn't even attributed the enchanting smell entrenching Hannibal's kitchen to food being prepared; he was more under the impression that there was always some sort of scent about the room to lure others in. That had always been *his* experience, at least.

"I've taken the liberty of acquiring an entrance form for Quantico," Hannibal announces during their dessert of the most elegant bread pudding Will has even seen. "The deadline for the fall semester was in July, but we can prepare you to start after the New Year."

Will stares at his lover (and doesn't *that* term feel foreign) from across the table, his bite of pudding frozen halfway to his mouth. "You really think you can get me in?"

Hannibal's lips twitch ever so slightly, the glint in his eyes the only thing to truly betray his amusement at Will's surprise. "As I said, under the guidance of a respected psychiatrist they have no reason to deny you due to psychological exams. Your aptitude for forensics and criminal justice speaks for itself, with the high marks you've received in your elective courses."

He can't help but frown at that, despite the praise. "How...how do you know how well I've done in my courses?"

Hannibal simply passes him a rueful smirk and a quirked eyebrow in response, as though he is surprised that Will is surprised.

He supposes he's not, really. The older man seems to have a way of gaining information that people around him wouldn't possibly expect him to know. Thrives on it, even. But, despite his complete and certainly dangerous infatuation with the doctor, Will decides to ignore that line of thinking and plow ahead with something a bit more relevant.

"I have my own room here."

It's not a question, for it was part of their agreement that it be so, and Will has seen the evidence for himself; Hannibal had, after they had had an impromptu welcome party for Matthew in the cellar, helped him haul his luggage to the second floor and to a room just across the hall from Hannibal's own. He hadn't missed the fact that the wardrobe and dresser were already fully stocked.

"You do," Hannibal agrees lightly.

"Do I…" Will blinks, pulls his gaze away from the penetrating stare of the man across from him. He stares instead at his wine glass, his thumb and forefinger cradling the stem delicately to twist the vessel in a gentle spin; the burgundy liquid sloshes up against its crystal prison at the movement. "Do I have to sleep there?" He glances up again, desperately hoping that his expression isn't half as vulnerable as he feels.

Hannibal's sharp features seem to soften slightly, the firelight that dances across his face shifting to something more warm than severe. "Only if you wish to," he answers, plucks up his own glass of wine to take in a luxurious inhale and then samples a delicate sip. "I...would not be remiss," he states slowly, carefully, "if you chose to spend the evenings with me."

A weight he didn't even realize he carried within him lightens at the statement. He imagines falling asleep next to Hannibal every night. All the times he's done it so far the sleep (when they got around to getting to sleep) has been the best Will has ever achieved. Will takes in a deep breath through his nose, trying only halfheartedly to hide how much that pleases him. Finally, he allows his lips to twist into a fond smile. "Let me help with dishes."

They make idle chatter for a little while as they get started, but soon they fall into a rhythmic pace, Hannibal washing while Will dries, and all that is heard is the occasional slosh of soapy water and the gentle, classical music that trickles softly from the kitchen speakers. A particularly somber and haunting piece has Will's mind turning back to the events of the morning, the other activities of the day having completely pushed it from his mind.

"Hannibal," he begins softly as he dries a plate. The man next to him gives a soft hum to indicate that he's listening. "Did you turn a man into a cello?"

Hannibal's hands pause beneath the water and he shoots Will an amused look. "Not that I can recall. Why do you ask?"

"Someone did. This morning--or, last night, probably. The liquor store I stopped at was down the street from that symphony hall. FBI was all over it." Will places the plate he's finished drying onto the small stack on the counter next to him and shrugs. "I was curious, so I went to go check it out. The uniforms didn't say outright that is was the Chesapeake Ripper, but a woman I met was pretty convinced. Have to say, it was definitely elaborate enough to think so."

The good doctor has returned to his washing but his sharp eyes are still trained on Will. "You saw the body?"

“Pictures,” Will clarified. “That woman I met was a reporter...Freddie Lounds?” he frowns as he says the name, though he’s never forgotten a name a day in his life.

“Tattlecrime,” Hannibal nods, hands a dripping wine glass to Will. “I’m familiar with her work.”

He can’t help but shoot a sly smirk to the man next to him. “Do you always enjoy her work, or just when she writes about you?” Hannibal very distinctly doesn’t answer that, and Will’s smirk morphs into a full blow grin. “Your ego is astounding,” he scolds playfully as he accepts another wine glass into his towel. “She was interesting. I liked her. She was kind enough to show me the pictures she had snagged before she was forcibly removed from the scene,” Will snickers a bit as he recalls the feisty woman practically being carried out by the officers on either side of her. “They should be up on her site now, if you wanna go get your tablet and see.”

And apparently Hannibal does, for he departs from the kitchen without a word and returns only a minute later, his step slowed as he navigates to the website in question. Will abandons his towel to the counter with the dishes and moves to lean against Hannibal’s side as they rest against the island, crowding into his space so he can see the article as well.

She’s blown up the pictures and Will can see the details a lot more clearly now. Once again he feels an immediate pull to the piece, his first instinct to draw a bow over the throat that’s been ripped open to see what sort of sound it would make. The body--instrument--has been displayed front and center on the large stage. Will wonders if the killer would have taken the time to attempt to play after setting it up. It would be a risk, to linger in such a place, but the acoustics would be incredible. He imagines that they would have done; couldn’t resist.

He wonders for whom they envisioned performing. Is this the dream of an amateur musician playing at being a virtuoso of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra? Did they seek to captivate and impress the masses? Or just one?

Beside him, Hannibal lets out a small, amused sound. “They’ve named the victim as Doug Wilson, a trombone player for the Orchestra,” he gives another soft huff. “It appears I have someone to thank. He was truly terrible, always coming in late. The Orchestra will only gain from his loss.”

He watches Hannibal gaze at the photo of the mutilated corpse with renewed interest and something seizes in Will’s gut. It’s hot, sharp and bitter; he’s surprised to decipher the emotion as jealousy. All at once, he’s fairly certain he knows who this killer was attempting to serenade. He doesn’t like it. He fights the pout that wants to overtake his face, instead reaches forward to gently tug the tablet from Hannibal’s hands. Hannibal only watches him, stoic and still, as he thumbs the button for the lock screen and places it on the island behind them. Then, Will moves.

He shifts and twists, slow and deliberate, until he is facing Hannibal and they are chest to chest, hip to hip. Leaning forward, he nuzzles gently into the crook of Hannibal’s neck, breathing in cedarwood and thyme, hands slipping beneath his jacket to stroke along the firm torso beneath it. Will can’t help but let out a soft sigh against the smooth flesh against his lips as he presses closer to that solid heat. He can feel the stirrings of his lover’s arousal as well as

his own when he rocks their groins together teasingly. Hannibal remains still, his arms dropped to his sides casually. Will doesn't mind; he wants to be the one touching right now. He needs to remind Hannibal of what he has right in front of him. He's not sure why, but it's imperative that he be the only killer to whom Hannibal gives his attention.

His tongue creeps out to swipe gently over the pulse at the base of Hannibal's throat, his own growing quicker when he can feel that Hannibal's is less than steady. His hands drop down to work at the belt secured around impeccably pressed pants, and then he's sinking down to his knees, his hands clutching at pants and briefs and dragging them down as he goes.

Hannibal is already hard and Will licks his lips as he regards the magnificent cock, lust blazing through him at the sight. Every inch of Hannibal is beautiful.

"What are you up to, darling boy?" Hannibal questions wryly, though it's really quite obvious. His voice is low; his tone holds notes of light amusement that tangle with thick desire.

Will blinks up at him, one hand coming to rest against his thigh while the other circles near the base of his cock to pull back his foreskin and give a teasing squeeze. Without breaking his gaze, Will leans forward and gives a small lick to the exposed tip, a short, pleased sound issuing from his throat as he gets a small taste of the intoxicating man above him. He turns his head to mouth slow, wet kisses down the length of him; once he reaches where his hand grasps he flattens his tongue and runs a hot stripe back up, mouth closing around the head and giving a gentle suck.

The sound Hannibal makes is controlled but undeniably pleased; it reverberates through Will's body and settles in his groin. Finally, he brings one hand up to swipe gently through unruly curls. "What an attentive boy I have," he praises, and Will swallows him down, hoping to coax out more; more praise, more sighs and groans, more of that fluid that is bitter and musky and *Hannibal.* "So eager to taste his Daddy's cock."

Will can't help it, even knowing that Hannibal is deliberately egging him on, the words strike right to that insatiable space inside him. He lets out a wanton moan around the cock in his mouth, his eyelids fluttering as desire floods into his core and begins to simmer there. On his knees, his legs spread out the way they are, Will can feel his own cock strain uncomfortably against the tight line of his slacks. When his focus returns to him, he begins bobbing his head with renewed vigor, the hand that has teased the base of Hannibal's cock moving to work in time.

His other hand drops from Hannibal's thigh to press down on the arousal between his legs, desperate for touch, for relief. He's barely grazed himself when Hannibal's polished shoe moves forward to tap his hand away, gentle but firm.

"No, Will," he declares, and the denial itself nearly has Will coming in his pants. A desperate, indignant moan tears from his throat as his hand is swatted away. "I know, darling," he sounds almost sympathetic as his hand strokes soothingly through Will's hair once more. "Be a good boy and make me come, and then Daddy will take care of you."

He whimpers needily around the cock in his mouth, he's just about to redouble his efforts when the gentle hand carding through his hair clenches into a tight fist, a second hand joining it. Will can do little more than go lax in the grip, open his throat and accept what is given to him as Hannibal begins to thrust into him. His thick cock strokes in and out rapidly, delving deeper with every thrust until the cockhead reaches the back of Will's throat and he chokes and gags at the intrusion.

The moan that falls from Hannibal's lips at the sensation is positively indecent; he quickens his pace. Will breathes raggedly through his nose whenever possible, that length thrusting deep to choke him every time now causing tears to leak from his watering eyes, drool to fall sloppily from the mouth that has become little more than a fuckhole. Will comes back to himself enough to paw helplessly at Hannibal's thighs and with one more groan and abrupt thrust he is pulsing, releasing, and Will can do little more than swallow down the seed that spills into the back of his throat.

He coughs and chokes when Hannibal pulls away from him, his hands falling to the floor for support as he pants for breath. His face is wet with tears and snot and drool and come; he feels disgusting. His cock aches, harder than ever, and he can feel every throb of his blood pulsing through the organ as it, still, strains neglected against the tightness of his trousers. A gentle had finds his cheek, tilts his face upwards, and he blinks through tears to gaze up at Hannibal.

"Beautiful," he breathes, his thumb tracking through the wetness of tears and saliva. He doesn't seem to mind the mess; if anything he is pleased that he caused it. "My good, beautiful boy. Why don't you come to bed and claim your reward?"

Will chokes on another whimper, allows Hannibal to pull him to his feet, to guide him upstairs to his--*their*--bedroom. He's not sure what sort of reward he gets for something like that--presumably one that will get him off--but he knows regardless with a deep and terrifying clarity that he will take whatever Hannibal decides to give him. Always.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will have a guest (over) for dinner.

Chapter Notes

Find me on tumblr. You know, if you want to.

"Oh God, fuck, *fuck!"* Will has full use of his mouth once more and he is taking every advantage, panting and moaning and cursing as he is systematically destroyed by Hannibal's tongue. "Oh please, *please,"* he gasps, though he isn't even quite sure for what he is pleading. For it to end? Continue?

He holds the position Hannibal guided him into (because that's what good boys do), on his elbows and knees, spread wide for the man behind him. His head dips lower, muscles quiver more fiercely with every lick and suck of Hannibal's mouth against his entrance. The man behind him hums contentedly at his distress, which only serves to vibrate through Will, remind him that Hannibal delights in bringing him to this excruciatingly blissful precipice between twisting in endless, overstimulated torment and falling into release.

With no preamble or warning whatsoever, a single digit penetrates the tight ring of his muscle and Will somehow spasms in a way that thrusts himself back and pulls himself away all at once, crying out at the sudden pressure that is both unexpected and not nearly goddamn enough. A fist curls and pounds against the mattress beneath him and he growls, pressing backwards, dipping his spine lower to present himself as perfectly as possible. Hannibal wants him perfect, he knows, whether he says so or not.

"*Fuck*," he spits, "*More,*" he demands (pleads). He is rewarded only with the slow thrust and retreat of the single digit already enveloped within him. The pace is steady, the intrusion shallow; he does not move to stretch, nor crook his finger to seek the spot that will blind Will with sparks of pleasure. "I thought--" he breaks off, keening as he attempts, once more, to thrust backwards to encourage a quicker pace. "I thought I was to be rewarded."

"You are, dear boy," Hannibal ensures him. Will is just about to point out that it doesn't feel that way when a second finger pushes into him, gliding deep until both are fully encased and then they are bending *just* so and--

“Nnngh!” he jerks and cries, his cock heavy and throbbing and leaking between his legs; too far above the mattress to seek purchase, forbidden from chasing his pleasure with his hand. “Please, baby, *please,* I need--I *need*--”

Hannibal works his fingers against Will’s prostate in earnest relentlessly, and suddenly the pleasure of climax, release, is crushing through him, pulsing in every vein, his cock painting stripes untouched onto the mattress beneath him. Will cries out, an ecstatic, unintelligible mix of pleasure and gratitude and, yes, just a little bit of sorrow that it’s not his lover’s thick cock within him spurring on the reaction. He squirms and yelps when his lover lays a sharp nip to the firm globe of his ass as he pants, coming down from his release.

“Exquisite,” Hannibal murmurs against his sensitive flesh, strokes a hand along the curve of his ass, up his back in approval. “My lovely Will,” the words fall hot against his skin as Hannibal trails wet kisses up his spine, “You are magnificent.”

Will can only let out a squeak of appreciation at that, having long since fallen flat to the mattress in exhaustion, mess be damned.

“Give me one moment, love,” Hannibal entreats, and then pulls away before Will can respond, before he can even process the new term of endearment.

Love.

He can’t truly say how much time passes, for as soon as Hannibal’s skin leaves his own he finds his body melting into the soiled sheets, his eyes slipping closed, sedated with release. It’s both an hour and a minute before Hannibal returns to him, beckoning him to follow. When Will can only give a displeased grunt to showcase that he doesn’t intend to move *any* where *any* time soon, Hannibal gives a soft huff and scoops him up, carting him into the en suite quite against his will.

When he realizes that the two of them are meant to get cozy in the warm bath Hannibal has drawn for them, Will immediately becomes compliant. Memories of that first night together flit through is mind, reminding him that this is relaxing, this is safe.

They settle together just as they had that first time, with Will lounging back against Hannibal’s long form, tucked between his strong legs. The water is warm and Hannibal is warmer, and Will finds that he is some sort of substance that is wholly pliant and malleable; he utterly *melts* against Hannibal’s commanding form behind him.

They soak in comfortable silence for awhile, Hannibal’s fingers skimming lightly over Will’s wet skin. When those fingers drift down his arms, reach his wrists, Will turns his hands so that they are palm up, and Hannibal continues the glide. He traces over the lines of Will’s palms, down each finger and back, finally slips his own digits in the negative space between Will’s and the two of them close their hands to grasp at the same time.

“We are having company for dinner on Sunday,” Hannibal murmurs against the shell of his ear. “An FBI acquaintance of mine, Jack Crawford,” Will tenses at the announcement and Hannibal nuzzles into his neck and breathes a soft *shush* in an attempt to relax him. “It would be advantageous for you to meet--he is the director of the Behavioral Sciences Unit.”

Will can't decide if he is more amused or appalled. "Pretty brazen to invite an FBI agent to your table, isn't it?"

Hannibal presses a soft hum into the skin behind his ear, "Not particularly. I have consulted on a number of cases for them with regards to building psychological profiles. In any case, I do believe old Jack will be much more interested in you than me."

He knows that the noise he makes in response is skeptical, self-deprecating. Hannibal ignores it, simply lets the matter drop, lets the silence stew as he disentangles their fingers and resumes his gentle exploration of Will's flesh. He relaxes back into the man behind him, eyes slipping closed to enjoy the sensation. He shifts, twists his head so that his ear rests against Hannibal's firm and furred chest, his head tucked beneath the other man's chin. The water is beginning to cool before either of them speak again.

"He was playing for you. You know that, right?" Will hates to bring it up, has debated doing so since they stood in the kitchen, staring at the pictures on Hannibal's tablet, and Will deduced who they were for. He hates to bring it up, but he has to know how Hannibal will respond.

"Yes, I know," his lover replies vaguely. His tone, at least, does not seem like it carries any affection or flattery.

Will pulls forward, twists around so that he is lying against Hannibal chest to chest, gazing up at his exquisite and unreadable face. "What will you do?"

Hannibal's eyes drift down to meet Will's, a hand coming up to cup his cheek tenderly. "Why should I do anything?"

The response makes him feel better, helps to quell that envious, enraged monster that had been shifting restlessly within him. At the same time, he has a feeling that events have not reached their conclusion just yet.

Despite Will's return, Hannibal must still see to his patients throughout the week and, due to his taking off the first part of the week, into the weekend as well. While he is established and renowned enough to have a more selective group of high-paying clientele, Will is still left with several hours throughout the week in which he must entertain himself. He spends the first few days exploring his new home, lounging around in the study reading, or soaking up the last of the summer sun in the garden.

When he runs out of things to entertain him at home (despite Hannibal's instance that he study up from some of his old anatomy and physiology textbooks), he begins to explore Baltimore. He finds a few parks and trails to navigate and feels entirely at ease stepping through the isolated forested areas, with only the occasional runner to pass him on the trail. It's odd, to feel so far removed from everything and know that he is still near the heart of the city. He wonders if Hannibal would walk the trails with him sometime before the snow comes. It would probably be quite a sight when the trees began to turn.

Despite still being something closer to strangers than lovers, the two of them seem to fall into a comfortable rhythm almost immediately. Hannibal keeps Will well-informed of when he will be leaving and returning home, as well when dinner will be held (Seven o'clock; Will has learned quickly that it's *always* seven o'clock). Some days he invites Will to sous chef for him while others he insists on parking Will in an obscenely comfortable chair in the corner of the kitchen with a whiskey or glass of wine where he either makes conversation with Hannibal or silently watches the mesmerizing dance of the man shifting through each action with impeccable grace.

After dinner they retire to the study with a nightcap where they converse about any wide variety of topics from music and art to philosophy and morality; one evening they spent a surprising forty minutes appreciating the work and character of David Bowie, much to Will's delight. When they retire to the bedroom, they usually spend an hour or two tiring each other out before they succumb to sleep.

The arrival of Sunday is a blessing and a curse. While Will greatly looks forward to two uninterrupted days with Hannibal (he has no patients on Mondays at the moment), it also heralds the dinner of this FBI director that Hannibal has been telling him about. While authority figures in general have never bothered Will, even considering what has been, arguably, his most productive hobby for the past three years, Will finds himself buzzing with a nervous energy for the better part of the day.

It takes several reassurances from Hannibal (and one tension-relieving, mind-numbing blow job) to begin to quell Will's anxiety. By the time the doorbell is signalling the arrival of their dinner guest, Will is only realizing that he and Hannibal haven't discussed how they would describe their relationship to the man and by then there is no time to work it out. He's just going to have to let Hannibal take the reins in conversation (not difficult to do, all things told) and trust where he leads them. Foolish as it may be, that trust has already been claimed by the doctor.

"Jack, so wonderful to see you again. I am sorry Bella was not able to join us," Will hears Hannibal greet their guest in the foyer as he lingers with uncertainty in the doorway of the kitchen.

"Good evening, Dr. Lecter. Bella had some NATO business to attend to this week; a conference in France, I believe it was."

"Yes, such important work she does." Will can hear Hannibal leading their guest into the dining room. "In any case, she may count herself lucky that she could not attend this time--I have a young man that I would like for you to meet. Quite a clever boy, with a remarkable way of interpreting things; I think he may be well suited to join your ranks. I'm sure Bella would have tired of the FBI recruitment before long."

Will decides to take that as his cue and steps from the kitchen into the dining room just as the large, dark-skinned man that is their dinner guest is agreeing emphatically with Hannibal. "She gets quite enough of the FBI talk at home."

The statement is said partially in jest, his tone light enough, but when Will meets the eyes of the FBI agent he can see a tightness there, almost a defensiveness. All at once he's pretty sure

this man and his wife's conversations about the FBI at home are considered more arguments than actual talking. Will blinks, retrains his line of sight to just over the man's shoulder and clears his throat. "Hello," he says, because he can think of nothing else.

"Ah, Will, perfect," Hannibal swoops in, saving him from an introduction himself. "Please meet Agent Jack Crawford, Director of the Behavioral Sciences Unit over at Quantico," he turns to Jack as Will crosses over to shake his hand. "Will Graham is a dear friend of mine, and interested in criminology and forensics."

Will gives a nod as he shakes his hand, attempts to ignore the unexpected disappointment at his introduction. It makes perfect sense, he realizes; if Hannibal was going to vouch for his mental state in any official capacity to help him get into Quantico they could hardly go around telling people they are romantically involved. Somehow, knowing this doesn't soothe the sting of being kept a secret.

Hannibal beckons them to sit, promising to return momentarily with their appetizers. Will takes his usual chair to the right of the head of the table and Jack settles across from him. He's glad to see that Hannibal has already taken the liberty of filling their wine glasses and is quick to take a sip of the red. He's not normally so unnerved around strangers, given his previous occupation, but despite Hannibal's devil-may-care attitude, Will still has reservations about dining with an FBI agent ten feet above their murder chamber.

"So, Will. Interested in the FBI, are you? Have you ever applied for the Academy?" Jack seems more than happy to lead the conversation, for which Will is grateful, having not really known where to begin.

"No, though I plan to apply for the January term. I've just arrived to town, actually. Until recently my work kept me traveling. I took what online courses I could, though." Will forces himself to sit still, denies the temptation to reach for his wine again.

"My wife and I know all about traveling for work," the man huffs gruffly. "What did you do, if you don't mind my asking?"

Will knows that if he's going to apply to train at Quantico the background checks will reveal his job history, but he still hesitates to come out and say that he was a carney. The word doesn't exactly have the purest connotations, after all. Once again, Hannibal saves him.

"Will was employed by Brighthouse Entertainment--the company responsible for that traveling carnival. A simple caprese salad, to start," he adds as he sets down their plates.

Simple it may have been, but it was beautiful all the same; a fan of gorgeously red tomato slices interspersed with the stark white of fresh mozzarella and vibrant green basil leaves. Will's eye dart over to the herb wall behind their guest to see that the basil plant looks considerably smaller this evening. There is a dark drizzle of something sprinkled delicately over the salad; balsamic, Will guesses, knowing that it is a common flavor to pair with this dish.

"They were in Baltimore about six weeks back--" Hannibal continues as they begin to eat.

“Bella and I attended!” Jack interjects with an enthusiasm that makes Will smile. “She’s a sucker for funnel cake. Can’t say I complain about the opportunity for corn dogs or cheese curds, either.”

“I ran one of the game booths,” Will chimes in.

The agent shoot him a rueful smile. “We wouldn’t have crossed paths, then. Bella will never let me near the games. Says my determination would cost us our nest egg.” They all chuckle at that and Will feels himself begin to relax incrementally. “How do you go from something like that to being interested in the FBI?”

Will gives a half shrug as he chews his bite, washes it down with a sip of wine. “I was always interested. In law enforcement, at least. If I had stayed in New Orleans I would have become a cop, I think.” The second he finishes the sentence he knows that he’s just opened up another line of questioning and Will fights the instinct to grimace. He knows that the next logical and seemingly polite question for this stranger to ask is why he left New Orleans to begin with, which only lends cause for Will to explain about his father’s illness and death, about how he was too poor to keep their apartment for more than six months afterwards, about how the carnival was in town and seemed like his only option, and in twelve years he has done little to progress his life.

He fights the endlessly grateful expression he wants to shoot to Hannibal when their host cuts in before the question can be asked. “Will has received outstanding marks in all of the elective courses he has taken,” Hannibal explains, “And, in fact, has an interesting theory in regards to all of that terrible business with the Orchestra.”

The shift from entertained guest to FBI field agent is subtle but swift; Will can see the man straighten slightly, see his features tighten just as they did when he was thinking about the arguments he and his wife have had. “The Ripper’s new kill?”

“It’s not the Ripper,” Will can’t help but blurt out, “I mean I don’t--I don’t think it is,” he corrects himself. The flush that rises to his face can only help sell his amateur opinion. He should not, after all, know for any certain fact who is and isn’t a victim of the Chesapeake Ripper.

Jack lets out a sharp sigh, setting his fork down on his empty plate and, Will thinks, resisting the urge to run his hands over his face. “I’m assuming you’ve been on Tattlecrime?” Will gives a sheepish nod. “I wish it weren’t so, but it all rings true of what we know about the Ripper. A man, brutally murdered, left in an elaborate display. No trace of DNA, organs missing--

“Organs missing?” Will repeats with surprise.

A conflicted expression passes over Jack’s face; he seems to be attempting to determine how much he should share about the situation. “Okay, look: I shouldn’t be sharing this with either of you, as it’s still an open case, but if it’s the Ripper--Hell, even if it’s not--I could use a fresh mind. The Chesapeake Ripper always takes a trophy, usually an organ or two. This most recent victim was missing his intestines.”

Hannibal excuses himself to clear their plates and retrieve the main course, but neither Jack nor Will acknowledge him, their attention locked firmly on one another across the table.

“I know what it seems like but I...More than one of my courses has used the Chesapeake Ripper as some sort of example or case study. Beyond that, I’ve followed his kills because my company has always traveled along the East Coast, which is essentially the most notorious, still active serial killer’s playground. I am intimately familiar with the Ripper’s work and this just...it isn’t it. I’m sorry, I don’t know how else to describe it.”

“I’m hoping now that you can tell me what it *is* , if it isn’t the Ripper,” Jack prompts. Will finds himself catching the man’s gaze and though his face remains professionally stoic (if not a little hopeful), his dark eyes belie his eagerness, his hunger. He can see all at once that this chase with the Chesapeake Ripper goes well beyond the bounds of Jack’s occupational, even his *moral,* duty. The man is obsessed. This hunt is personal.

Will wonders exactly what it was that Hannibal did to make it so. Perhaps he should ask him later on.

“I don’t think it’s the Ripper,” Will restates, “I think it’s his admirer.”

Hannibal returns with their main course and Will is too busy forcing himself to hold the steady gaze of the agent across from him calmly to even hear whatever it is they are eating. Knowing Hannibal it is probably something he couldn’t even repeat, anyways. It’s silent for a few minutes (apart from compliments to the chef) as they tuck into this new course--some rich meat with a tart and sweet blood red sauce--before Jack finally speaks again.

“His admirer,” he says, rolling the term around in his mouth as if to see how it tastes. From the look on his face, Will guesses it’s a bittersweet theory; a relief that perhaps his nemesis isn’t responsible after all and a dread that this new killer may draw him into leaving a response. “What makes you think so?”

“You’re correct in that it looks like something the Ripper might come up with. I mean--” Will breaks off a huff, shaking his head, “Ripping open a man’s neck and shoving a cello neck down his throat is nothing if not elaborate. He even took an organ, which is interesting, but not unusual if he is imitating his idol in hopes to be recognized. But the entire piece played like a performance. Not a performance for the FBI, though. Not like what the Ripper has always done. This feels more...intimate. A serenade. Perhaps he wants to make contact with the Ripper.”

“Perhaps he already has,” their long silent host interjects. They both glance to Hannibal; Will shakes his head.

“No, I don’t think so. The whole thing plays like...like an audition. Like he’s trying to prove that he would be a compatible companion. He’s killed before this, but this was his first performance. His audition,” Will says again, because he finds that he likes the way that word fits the situation.

Jack turns his attention to Hannibal, his eyebrows raised. “You weren’t exaggerating, Dr. Lecter. His mind is...extraordinary. A natural talent.” He turns back to Will and Will ducks

his head as heat floods his cheeks at the praise. “The application deadline for the January term is October 31st, though I suggest submitting it sooner rather than later. You make sure to let me know when you get it in, so I can make sure it comes straight to me,” he instructs.

Will’s eyes dart to Hannibal and, witnessing the unspeakably pleased and proud expression on his face, quickly back to the table; a distinctly different sort of heat pulses through him and he wishes they didn’t have a guest so Will didn’t have to wait to see exactly how Hannibal would be showing him his approval.

Swallowing the lump that has lodged in his throat, willing his arousal to calm itself so he can actually make it through the rest of this damned dinner, Will can only nod and mumble his assent.

Will bids Jack farewell in the dining room, the two of them expressing their pleasure at having made acquaintance once more, and then Hannibal sees their guest out while Will begins to transfer their dessert dishes to the kitchen. He’s just made his second trip, setting their wine glasses onto the counter gingerly and turns around to gather the dishes sitting on the island--

Hannibal is standing in the doorway, his gaze hungry, predatory, and completely locked on Will. Will’s mouth goes dry, his breath hitching in his chest as their eyes lock and his lover prowls toward him. Excitement quickens his heart rate, arousal warms his skin and the overwhelming desire to consume and be consumed slides through his veins like fire. He’s locked into place like prey that hopes its stalker won’t notice it if it remains *very* still until Hannibal has drawn up next to him. Will is still fighting to take in anything more than shallow, panting breaths.

“I knew you would enamor him,” Hannibal breathes when they’re nearly chest to chest, one hand raising up to brush tenderly across Will’s jaw, settles in a firm grasp at the back of his neck. “My perfect boy,” Will tilts his head up to keep Hannibal’s gaze, sways closer until their lips are nearly brushing together. He feels drunk; buzzed, certainly, from the wine, but completely intoxicated by Hannibal’s warmth, his scent, his praise, his presence. “You made Daddy so proud tonight.”

Will can’t help it; he whimpers at the statement, squeezes his eyes shut and closes the space remaining between them to seek desperately hungry kisses. He’s rewarded with a sharp nip to his bottom lip and a hot tongue plunging into his mouth, stroking across every part of him it can reach. He groans into the kiss, pressing closer with his body as well. Hannibal’s answering growl into his mouth thrums down his throat, reverberates through his whole being, and suddenly he is being twisted, lifted and then he is perched up on the counter, Hannibal a hot line between his spread thighs.

The hand at his neck snakes up into his hair, turns to a fist to find purchase and then his head is yanked back and the hot tongue and sharp teeth are at his throat. Will’s mouth has been freed to resume its frantic attempts at breath, but every other second Hannibal does something that makes him gasp and groan and he has to start all over again at trying to encourage an action which should be instinctive. The fact that Hannibal is so entrenched in

his own arousal that he hoisted Will up onto his precious counter (an action that Will was reprimanded for once, sternly, on his second day in Baltimore and never dared to repeat) only adds to the dizzying heat that courses through him.

His cock is rock hard, aching in his slacks; something that Will doesn't even notice, given the fervent ministrations being lavished upon his upper body, until Hannibal's deft hands turn their attention to his belt. He lifts his hips instinctively as those graceful hands turn to claws and yank his clothing down.

"Oh fuck--*yes,* Daddy, *please*," he whines, his hips lifting again to bring attention to his leaking cock when it receives no immediate touch.

His lover's attention, it seems, is focused instead on reaching down the island to the bottle of olive oil near the stove, tipping it to make sure his fingers are coated generously. His other hand finds Will's low back and hauls him forward until his ass is nearly hanging off the edge of the counter. Just as Will finds the wherewithal to get his legs wrapped around the man between them, two fingers are breaching his tight hole.

Will throws his head back, his body arching into the rough and insistent touch with abandon. He only becomes aware of the debauched moan sliding from his throat when Hannibal's chuckle puffs hot breath against his neck.

"Lovely little thing," Hannibal murmurs into his skin between harsh, sucking kisses. "So needy, so hungry for it." Even if he could form words, Will wouldn't be able to deny Hannibal's; his hips press forward into each thrust of Hannibal's fingers, urging him to go faster, willing him deeper. Will can feel the smile pressed against his chest when each movement causes a cascade of gasps and whimpers to slip from his mouth. "Tell me what you want, darling."

"You," Will gasps, pleased to find that speech is not quite the impossibility he imagined it to be. "Oh, God, *you,* Hannibal. I want you to fuck my brains out against this counter." As if to prove his point, Will unfurls his hands from the desperate clutch they've had on Hannibal's jacket and drops them to work at getting his pants open. Another surge of desire floods through him when he feels just how hard Hannibal is, straining against trousers, and his own cock throbs against his belly.

They barely get Hannibal's pants pushed out of the way, Hannibal's oiled hand stroking his cock once to slick it up, and then he's plunging into Will, hard and thick and filling his tight hole so well that Will wants to sob. When Hannibal grabs Will's hips and lifts him away form the counter, his own hands fall to the edge to help maintain his balance. In this position, Hannibal can fuck into Will with wild abandon and he takes every opportunity to do so; every thrust fills him completely, strikes against his prostate, pulls a rough grunt from Hannibal and a keening wail from Will.

It ends just as abruptly as it began; Hannibal hits Will's prostate one too many times and then he's crying out, coming untouched between them and Hannibal seems to collapse into him as his release strikes as well.

"*Fuck,*" Will chokes out as they pant against each other. His dress shirt clings to his sweaty torso, the front ruined with his release, Hannibal's own suit is a rumpled, wrinkled mess. "I wanted you to do that all night."

"I know," Hannibal breathes raggedly, the hint of a smirk on his kiss-bruised lips. "Naughty boy. What a mess you've made of my counter."

Will wants to point out that *he* was the innocent, manhandled party in all this, but then Hannibal is kissing him breathless once again, and his arms are wrapping around Will and hoisting him up, carrying him from the kitchen. Will tightens around him, allows himself to be swept away to the bedroom and similarly swept away by Hannibal.

If the Cello Man was a message to the Chesapeake Ripper (and by the possessive anger that still coils through Will at the thought, it's safe to say he is certain that is the case), the Ripper does not respond in kind. Instead, he sees to his patients when he must, sees to Will when he can; he even joins Will for a walk through his favorite secluded path one afternoon. They eat dinner together and Hannibal sketches Will while Will reads by the fireplace and they have more sex than Will had ever dreamed possible.

They do not talk about the Cello Man, nor the killer responsible for his creation, until they are forced to.

It's nearly three weeks since Will had arrived in Baltimore, two since their dinner with Jack Crawford, that finds Will and Hannibal having a lazy (but productive) Sunday morning in bed when Hannibal's phone rings. Hannibal freezes at the intrusive sound and Will can see his hesitation, can practically read the deliberation in his eyes as he considers ignoring the call to continue favoring Will's neck with his lazy kisses.

"It could be a patient," Will points out, though a very physical portion of him wants to say fuck *whoever* it is. One of them has been in great distress this week, Will recalls Hannibal mentioning, and if a patient has rung the emergency office line that forwards to Hannibal's cell outside of his office hours it could be a dire situation.

Hannibal relents, pulling away with a reluctance that makes Will's heart melt a little to retrieve the phone on his nightstand. "Dr. Lecter speaking," he greets, and then a moment later, "Good morning, Jack. Not at all. To what do I owe the pleasure?" Amber eyes flit to Will, the slight raise of his pale eyebrows the only indication of his surprise. "Yes, he's right here, actually. We were just having breakfast."

That statement combined with the unfettered hungry gaze that travels down Will's naked flesh sends blood surging both to his cheeks and his cock. He hardly even realizes that he is being passed the phone until Hannibal folds it into his hand. Will blinks at it blankly for a moment and then seems to remember what it's for. He clears his throat as he raises it to his ear. "Hello?"

"Will Graham? Jack Crawford. We met at dinner a few weeks back--"

“I remember,” Will tells him, pushing himself into a sitting position, “What can I do for you, Agent Crawford?”

“Jack is fine, please. I’m sorry to intrude on your Sunday, I know this is out of the blue--”

“Don’t worry about it, Jack. What do you need?”

There’s a beat of silence, and then: “I need to borrow your imagination.”

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Will visits his first crime scene, then experiences another first with Hannibal.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will sits in the passenger seat of Hannibal's Bentley, his fingers drumming anxiously against his thigh as he watches the streets pass by out his window. A warm hand comes from his left, covers his own and presses heavy to still the nervous digits.

"Relax, Will. Jack wouldn't have called you here unless he was confident in your abilities." Hannibal's voice is low, soothing, and somehow, frustratingly, does nothing to remove the edge that Will is feeling.

"How could he be? I don't even understand what this *ability* is. I was barely aware of it until--" he breaks off the sentence with a soft huff, glaring at the buildings that blur by. He was barely aware of what he could see, *all* that he could see, until he met Hannibal. But saying it out loud feels like a refusal, like he is unhappy with what has come to pass since this strange and entirely captivating man came into his life. Will couldn't feel farther from regret at that. "I don't know what he expects me to say. I don't know how I can *possibly* be more qualified to do this than people he already has on his team. Hell, even current students. I'm--I'm *nobody.* I'm--"

The hand over his on his thigh tightens at that, and though Hannibal's eyes never stray from the road his voice comes out clipped, commanding. "You are *not,* " he states firmly. "You are not nor have you ever been *nobody,* Will. You are astounding."

Will flushes at the praise, at the insistence in Hannibal's tone that is almost painfully endearing. Something tightens in his chest at the words; if Hannibal believes them so fiercely...perhaps they are true?

They reach their destination much quicker than Will would have liked, police tape and silently flashing cruisers beckoning them to the display. He takes a glance around as they exit the Bentley. They've ended up near some sort of shipping yard; Will can see a sign stating that the massive lot to their left belongs to Amports, a company that processes new cars being imported for sale. No security cameras that he can see, here at the end of this road, which makes the spot ideal for displaying a kill in a more *unique* design. The only other reason the killer seems to have chosen this spot is because they happen to be standing at the end of Chesapeake Avenue.

Will spots Jack brushing through officers and field workers alike as he makes his way over to them, greeting Hannibal warmly first, and then Will.

“It’s good to see you again. Thanks for coming,” he gives Will’s hand a firm shake and then turns back immediately to begin leading them through the crowd to the scene. Eager, this one.

“Sure,” Will agrees, nearly tripping over his own feet in his haste to follow Jack’s abrupt change in direction. “I just--well, I guess I’m wondering *why?* ” Jack barely spares him a glance over his shoulder at the inquiry. “I mean, I know *why* but...well, *how* I guess, is what’s plaguing me. Aren’t there rules in place for stuff like this? I haven’t studied the law side of things extensively, but I’m pretty sure any evidence I could turn you toward would be like...inadmissible...wouldn’t it?”

He chances a glace to his left to find Hannibal’s lips pulled tight, quirked up ever so slightly at the ends to reveal his amusement at the fumbling mess Will has suddenly morphed into. He scowls at his lover, which only causes a pale brow to quirk in response.

Jack stops short at the yellow line and spins to face Will, causing him to stumble over himself once again at the abrupt halt. Apparently, when he’s away from the dinner table, everything about Jack Crawford is abrupt. The agent produces something from the pocket of his jacket and pushes it into Will’s hands. Will frowns down at the laminated badge with his name on it; they’ve even taken the liberty of pulling his DMV photo. “Consulting...detective?” he shifts his confused frown to the large man next to him. “Isn’t that a Sherlock Holmes thing?”

“Now it’s an FBI thing,” Jack states, showing no reaction whatsoever to the reference. “Honestly the title matters less than the fact that you’re on payroll. That badge could pronounce you King of Imaginationland; as long as you’re paid to fill the role, evidence is admissible.”

Will gapes at Jack, at Hannibal, back to Jack. “I’m--I’m *getting paid*?!” That was *not* something they had discussed on the phone. Will is honestly a little embarrassed he never even thought to bring it up. This is his time, after all, his effort; why shouldn’t he be compensated?

“Don’t get too excited; it’s nothing that will pay the bills but it’s compensation for your work. Come on, time to earn your paycheck,” he beckons Will to follow him under the tape line. Having not been told explicitly to stay or come, Hannibal follows them silently. The three of them halt when they’ve pushed through enough of the lingering officers and forensics teams to get a clear view of the display.

“Will Graham, this is Beverly Katz, Jimmy Price and Brian Zeller. My forensics A-Team,” Jack introduces the three agents still lingering around the body--what *used* to be a body--but Will can hardly spare the three a glance in recognition.

This display is...well, it’s not one of the Rippers, which Will has always seemed to find beautiful or humorous even before he knew the creator, but it is breathtaking all the same. It will be difficult to identify the victim unless they happen to already have a profile in CODIS, for there is not much to identify beyond tissue samples. The bits of corpse that remain have been crafted into a crude harp. The spine of whatever unlucky person served as the killer’s

spare parts forms the arch of the harp, the natural curve of the backbone a very fitting shape indeed. An entire leg, stripped of all flesh, extends straight down on the far end to act as the pillar; another leg (minus the foot), meat on this time, acts as the soundbox, the thickest part of the thigh at the base and slimming naturally into the calf and ankle towards the top. The feet of the harp are the corpse's feet in their entirety, lopped off just above the ankle bones.

Someone is beside him, offering him a pair of gloves--the woman, he notes with a glance and a silent nod of thanks. He pulls them on and drifts closer to the display. This harp has strings, but they don't look as they should. Pale, white stretched things, clearly they had been treated to perform; Will would bet that the vocal cords on the last body had been treated as well. His eyes slip closed, envisioning the human forms from Hannibal's anatomy textbooks.

"Veins," he murmurs out loud, opening his eyes to observe the piece once more. Veins stripped from the body, stretched and treated to act as catgut would…

Will can't help it, doesn't even think about what he's doing. He stands at the back of the harp, reaches forward and strums his fingers along the makeshift strings. The improvised instrument actually performs for him, though without the complex pin system to vary tautness it's impossible to achieve more than one note; a sick, low twang emanates from each vein that his fingers pass over. Behind him, the dark haired analyst gags; the other two stand before him and gape as though he's grown a second head.

Perhaps he should not have played the human corpse.

He steps back, clearing his throat, but he can't shake the haunting, echoing chime that the body produced for him. All at once he wishes desperately that he had had the chance to draw a bow across those vocal cords. He can see the music that this killer wishes to play, can feel it in his bones. He can't help but admire their ingenuity, though any respect they may have garnered from him is immediately overturned by the fact that they are attempting to serenade *his* lover.

Folding his hands behind his back to further resist the temptation to touch (and praying that the stance comes off as casual to everyone else), Will regards the display. He lets his eyes slip closed, trying to imagine how the piece was assembled and, in turn, who did the assembling, by dismantling it piece by piece in his mind. It's a male, surely, though Will can't say entirely how he knows that. Perhaps just the knowledge that, statistically, murders such as this are rarely performed by females may be influencing his opinion, but there's something else there that Will can't quite place. An underlying energy to the piece; it feels rigid and cold and distinctly male.

There's a fascination with instruments, obviously. Will recalls that Hannibal had stated the first victim's murder was well deserved, the man having first murdered countless musical pieces as an incompetent trombonist for the Baltimore Metropolitan Orchestra. So their killer either has ties to the music community or he's an avid fan. Both? Intimate knowledge of instrument construction--stringed ones at least.

He imagines a faceless victim lying before him, imagines slicing into them and systematically removing the veins. He removes the legs, flays and boils one until only bone remains; does the same with the spine. He brings the pieces to this place. No security

cameras, few enough street lights this close to the harbor to be able to work in darkness. The piece is assembled swiftly, the treated veins strung down the length of the harp and still more untreated veins wrapped tightly around each point to hold the structure together.

Does he stay to play for the Ripper? A song on the dead in the dead of night?

Will's eyelids flutter, blink open. He's momentarily blinded by daylight, blinking around in a daze at he struggles to place himself back in the here and now. Well that was certainly interesting. The others are staring at him again, that bewildered, wary expression cast across their faces. Had be been speaking out loud? Oh; he's up next to the harp again, one hand stroking gently down the spine. He should probably stop that. He clears his throat and steps away once more, turning his back on the display as he chews his lip and thinks.

This kill is not like the first. The first served two purposes: to elevate the mediocre trombonist (thus improving the orchestra) and to be seen. This kill...reeks of a desperation to be noticed, acknowledged; the placement at the end of Chesapeake Avenue far too on the nose to be anything else. He'd gleaned a few details, possibly enough to narrow a search for Jack and his team. If he tells them.

He doesn't want to tell them. He doesn't want this killer handled by the system.

Hannibal and Jack are waiting for him half a dozen feet away. When he returns to them, he ignores Jack's immediate inquiry as to what he'd been able to deduce.

"Can I have the file for the first murder?"

He's still half-lost in his head, which is perhaps why Jack doesn't insist on Will explaining anything to him immediately and agrees readily to hand over the file for his perusal.

The file for the first victim is back at Quantico, so Will and Hannibal agree to meet Jack there. As long as they are on-site, Jack suggests taking Will down to the lab to have a look at the corpse as well.

The trio of forensics analysts that had been at the crime scene have returned, presumably to work on tissue analysis and whatever else they might have been able to gather. The woman--Katz, Will urges himself to refer to her by name since they are now colleagues of sorts--is crouched in one corner of the room with the harp, which they brought back to the lab in one piece, and is running swabs along each of the individually strung veins.

The younger man, Zeller, pulls the body out for them, though Price stops what he's doing shortly afterwards to join them around the corpse. Jack makes himself busy in the corner talking to Katz while the other two give Will and Hannibal a rundown on the what the forensics team found. There were various chemicals present on the vocal cords and all of the muscle and fatty tissue had been removed from the area. Will is only half-listening to them as he stares at unfortunate Mr. Wilson, his head tipped back and frozen, throat ripped open, mouth agape; he tries to picture what the corpse would like this close with a cello neck shoved down the orifice.

“The sulfur dioxide had the effect of hardening the vocal cords,” Price is saying when Will bothers to pay attention again. He perks at that information.

“Made them easier to play,” he announces. His eyes inevitably drift back down to the body splayed out before him. “Had to open you up to get a decent sound out of you,” he mutters darkly, hardly aware that he’s spoken out loud at all until the strained silence around them is broken by Zeller’s soft ‘Jesus…’. Will glances up; three sets of eyes are on him, though Hannibal’s hold considerably less judgement than the other two.

Zeller is gaping at him for the third time that day, but when Will meets his gaze he blinks and clears his throat, attempting to affect a nonplussed tone. “He, uh, he took the time to whiten the vocal cords before playing them--”

“It’s not about whitening them,” Will counters quickly. “It was about increasing elasticity.”

“He treated the vocal cords the same way you treat catgut string,” Hannibal finally speaks, blessedly drawing attention from Will. He’s never felt uneasy per se under scrutiny, but he’s fairly certain he’s not been making a very good first impression. “I have a harpsichord that uses catgut,” Hannibal states by way of explanation.

“You’ll find the same process has been done to the veins on the harp,” Will predicts. “I, uh, I’m getting a headache,” he directs to Hannibal softly, pulling the case file in his hands up to his torso to hug like a shield. “I’ll take a look at the file; don’t know how much more use I’m going to be here right now.”

Much to Will’s relief, Hannibal nods and bids farewell to the analysts immediately, turning to lead them to the corner to impart the same information to Jack before they depart.

Will is silent for most of the ride back to Baltimore, stuck in his own head as he is. As they near the house, Hannibal inquires as to his well-being.

“I don’t have a headache,” he admits freely, “I just couldn’t stay there and watch them stare at me like that any longer. I’ve--” he pauses, chewing his lip for a moment as he attempts to turn over the turmoil roiling inside him into words. “I’ve never slipped into a killer’s mindset like that before. Even when I saw pictures of your scenes I was always...viewing from the outside. I understood it, but I was me. Today...it’s not really felt like I’m me.” He slumps back in his seat with a sigh, running his hands over his face anxiously. To feel like he is in someone else’s skin is an oddity, to be sure, but he’s still not touched on what’s truly been eating at him.

“You’re finally exploring the boundaries of your empathy,” Hannibal states, and the explanation comes so freely to him it’s irritating. Fucking shrinks. “It’s natural to feel displaced when you are allowing another into your mind. I imagine you’ll grow accustomed to the sensation eventually, better learn how to hold the divide between where you end and others begin.”

He can’t stop the skeptical huff that escapes his throat as he turns his attention to outside the car, resting his forehead against the cool glass of the passenger window. “Maybe I won’t. Maybe the lines will just blur further and further until I don’t know who I am anymore.”

He doesn't even realize they've arrived home until Hannibal is putting the car in park and reaching over to him, urging his head to twist so that he may look him in the eyes. "I would never let that happen, Will," Hannibal assures him. And just like that, that doubt, at least, is assuaged.

After all that running around, it's mid-afternoon by the time they are stepping back into the house. They bypassed lunch entirely and Will is famished, glad to see that Hannibal begins setting to work on prepping dinner immediately. He doesn't ask for Will's assistance, so Will relegates himself to the plush armchair in the corner. He lasts there for all of three minutes before he's up again, meandering restlessly around the room.

"You're still troubled by something," Hannibal observes, his tone entirely neutral and his attention focused more on the carrots on his cutting board than on the anxious man currently bouncing around his kitchen.

Will stills at the island, across from Hannibal, resting his fingertips upon the cool metal lightly as he watches Hannibal's quick and effortless knifework. "This killer is getting rather impatient for a response from you. A tableau on Chesapeake Avenue? It reeks of desperation."

"Yes," Hannibal agrees. And that's all he says: just 'yes'. No comment on the killer's interest in himself, no reassurance that he doesn't plan to act on it. Just 'yes', spoken noncommittally but with a hint of consideration all the same.

Will's stomach turns, bile sour at the back of his throat at the thought of Hannibal killing for another, creating *art* for another, when he's yet to even extend that gesture to his live-in lover.

"You're not, are you? Going to respond?" he's playing the only hand he has, and likely too early, but Will would rather risk Hannibal discovering the extent of his displeasure and have a straight response than keep his emotions shielded and be kept in the dark.

Broad shoulders rise in as much of an elegant shrug as they can without it affecting the blade that is now slicing up some red peppers. "It's crossed my mind. If this killer escalates any more I may not have a chance before he's apprehended, unless I act soon."

Will's heart plummets from his chest to his gut at the response. He swallows around the lump in his throat, glaring down at the counter, rather than at the man across from him. His eyes find the case file that he'd abandoned there when they first arrived home and he reaches out to it, sliding it back and forth slowly an inch at a time, trying desperately to focus on something else so he doesn't open his mouth and say--

"You can't. I don't--I don't want you to."

That, finally, garners Hannibal's full attention. His knife freezes mid-slice, his amber eyes darting up to regard Will. Will's own blue pull up at the same time, as if they were linked by a magnetic connection. He clenches his teeth, braces himself to fight the shiver that threatens to spill down his spine. He hasn't seen that hard look in Hannibal's gaze since the night they met, when Hannibal had him pinned against a wall, fucking into him for all he was worth, telling Will that he had returned with the intention of killing him.

When he speaks his tone is low, cold and brooks no argument. “I am not accustomed to being told what I may and may not do, darling.” Even the endearment doesn’t take the edge off the statement, the word all but hissed in a way that only Hannibal can manage.

Will doesn’t even realize that he’s taking a step back until he notices that his hands are no longer touching the island. The prey instinct only further serves to fuel his anger and he clenches his teeth, biting back a growl as his spine snaps straight, chin tilts up defiantly. “Who is he, anyways? Some hack nutjob that is just as likely to want to kill you as worship you? Who cares?!” The volume of his voice is far beyond where he wants it to be, but even with that awareness Will can’t seem to reign it in once the floodgates have opened.

“Are you truly interested in who’s behind these murders, or is your ego really so goddamn big that you need to seek out and surround yourself with absolutely *anyone* that will stroke it for you? What, are you--are you gonna take on another *protege*? You gonna fuck that one too?!”

“Perhaps.”

One word, two syllables, stops Will dead. His stomach does that unpleasant flopping thing again and for just a moment he’s fairly certain his heart clenches so hard and so painfully that it fully stops beating. His mouth is hanging open, his rant stolen from him just as surely as his breath, and when he realizes this he snaps it shut. He knows his eyes are gaping just as wide, but he doesn’t dare shut those; they are burning far too intensely for him to trust that they will not release tears if he does.

Hannibal takes advantage of Will’s pause, setting his knife down the cutting board deliberately and striding around the other side of the island toward Will with purpose. Will twists his body to face the man, can’t not, but his eyes immediately drop to the floor. A hand grasps his chin, not unkindly, and tilts it up, encouraging Will to meet his gaze. He can smell the peppers that linger on the man’s skin. Will takes a steadying breath through his nose, exerts every ounce of willpower within him to force back the wetness from his eyes, and then raises them.

With annoyance written over Hannibal’s features, the sharp angles of his face, normally so uniquely beautiful, lend a more frightening image. His gaze is hard, steady, and Will swears that his eyes are more the ruddy brown of blood-soaked earth with anger burning behind them. The mouth that just that morning was pressing slow, sensual kisses into his tender flesh is now pulled into a tight line, his jaw locked rather than lax with pleasure and arousal.

“I am fond of you, Will,” Hannibal informs him, and his voice is also not unkind, the edge that it had held as he gripped his chef’s knife across the counter no longer present. “I am. But it will not do for you to forget the reason you are here. I provide for your needs and you provide for mine. Money for company. That’s the arrangement.”

He’s not wrong, but Will almost feels as though he’s been slapped when the blunt word drops from Hannibal’s tongue. The reminder that this is an arrangement, not a relationship, is as painful as it is necessary. He’s forgotten himself, swept up in the easy, casual intimacy that Hannibal has been providing for him--the first of Will’s life. He has somehow forgotten that

he has no right to make demands of Hannibal unless those demands pertain to something with a price tag.

Will swallows around the persistent lump in his throat, bobbing his head in a nod as much as he can with his chin still in Hannibal's grasp. He twists his head away from the hand, deceptively warm when the man it belongs to is cold to the core, and takes a step back, nodding again. "Yeah. Good point." He glances away to the counter beside them, sucking his teeth as he calmly reaches over to retrieve the case file. "You, uh, you can go ahead and just prepare dinner for one; I don't have much of an appetite this evening."

He turns and stalks from the room and Hannibal does not argue nor attempt to stop him. He puts effort into refraining from snapping his feet down with the intensity that he has so clearly just been forbidden to show; he takes the stairs slower than usual so that he doesn't stomp up them like a child. And then he slips into his room, the room that he's essentially only been using as a closet, and locks the door behind him.

He spends some time with the case file fanned out around him on the bed, wracking his brain for anything that could point him toward someone. If Hannibal is interested in this instrument maker then Will is just going to have to find him first. He stares at the words and images until his eyes ache and letters begin to blur together. And then, for the first time since he arrived in Baltimore, Will sleeps in his own bed, alone, his body curled around one of the extra pillows with his eyes squeezed shut tight so he can better pretend that the bed isn't as big and empty as it is.

It's the cold that wakes Will, the chilled air around him and the even colder stainless steel table beneath him. He realizes two things as soon as he attempts to shift to curl in on himself for warmth:

He is naked, evident by the shocking tendril of cold that wraps around each formerly warm bit of flesh as he moves around, and his wrists and ankles are bound in place. He forces his eyes open, though he knows the sight that will meet them will be the ceiling of Hannibal's cellar.

Fuck, shit, damn, he probably shouldn't have picked a fight with a serial killer.

As if the mere thought summoned the man, Hannibal's face comes into view above him; the fondness in his eyes and pleased curl of his mouth nearly breaks Will's heart in two. "I'm so glad you've woken, darling. I was hoping you would be present for this."

Before Will can even inquire as to what 'this' is, he feels a slow draw along his torso, at the bottom just above his hips, starting at his right side and wrapping around to the left; it's a sharp sting followed by a prickling burning. Will tips his head up as much as he can to peer down his body so he can see what's going on just as Hannibal's scalpel reaches his left side and the cut ends.

He doesn't feel panic or resentment, oddly enough, but a strange curiosity as to the nature of the cut, too shallow and low on his body to do any grievous harm. He watches as Hannibal's

wrist adjusts, twisting the position of the scalpel to run up along Will's left side. This area is a lot more sensitive than the paunch of his belly, and he can't help but attempt to twist and squirm away from the offending object as it passes over his ribs.

"What are you doing?" he finally asks as the second cut ends near the crook of his armpit.

His lover's hand pauses in the action of reaching over his chest and blinks at him. "I'm skinning you," he states simply, his tone one to imply that that should be perfectly obvious to Will. He resumes his actions, reaching over to begin a cut at the point that mirrors the last, drawing it over his pecs with slow precision. When that one is finished, Hannibal moves to the other side of the table to draw the scalpel down Will's right side, connecting the top and bottom points to complete the rectangle. The fingers of his free hand dig into the upper corner, the scalpel slipping in to free Will's flesh from the muscle beneath.

It's uncomfortable, to say the least, and Will grits his teeth against the pain. "Why?" he asks, for he must know. The why somehow matters more than the fact that it's happening at all.

Hannibal pauses in his task once more, one hand holding up a large corner of freed skin while the scalpel digging into his pectorals stills. "It's been entertaining to know you, Will," he tells him, that fondness in his eyes flooding into his tone. "But I've decided to try again."

"Try…?"

"This arrangement," he further details, going back to work. "With another protege. Perhaps one who will know his place. But first I must send him a gift."

"You're giving him my *skin?"* He tries to feel offended, he truly does, but all he can manage is a gut-clenching, mind-numbing heartache at being so easily replaced.

His lover laughs at that. "Don't be silly, dear boy. I'm *tanning* your skin. To stretch for a drum. I think you'd make a lovely timpani; such beautiful, pale, flawless skin. Ah, there we are," he sighs with pleasure when the patch has been removed successfully, holding it up high in admiration. "See?" Hannibal twists the flesh around for Will's viewing pleasure.

But Will's skin is far from flawless. All he can see are the purple and red points where fingers dug in a little too strongly, where his lover's mouth kissed and sucked against him and teeth sought to claim. He was giving up his claim, Will realized, and felt horror at the thought for the first time since he woke. He's giving those marks, what belongs only to the two of them, to someone else--

Will wakes with a shudder and a gasp, not realizing until he blinks several times that he's staring at the wall because he had lurched into a sitting position as he clawed himself from that nightmare. He's a bit disoriented, waking in a room that he's never slept in before, but after another moment he realizes it's his closet. Then he remembers that he's sleeping here because he's pissed at Hannibal and the surreal happenings of his dream start to click into place and make sense.

He wants to leave this too large bed, this unfamiliar room, and go crawl back into his rightful place next to Hannibal. Heaving a sigh, Will rubs his face with his hands vigorously, chasing

away the last remnants of sleep and that awful dream. Even if his pride allowed such a thing, he has no idea what sort of mood Hannibal is in, having lost his temper on the man, stalked off and skipped dinner. Perhaps his presence was not desired in that bed tonight.

Will doesn’t think he could stomach the potential rejection, especially not after having his subconscious fuck around with his deep-seeded fears of abandonment, and so he stays. Doubting that sleep would come to him again, Will flicks on his bedside light and retrieves the case file he had placed there before turning in. If he isn’t going to rest he may as well work. He has a killer to find, after all.

Chapter End Notes

Heyoo! So I gotta give a shoutout to my girl ScarletteStar1, who responded to my random inquiry of 'What's an instrument you could make out of a person's corpse?' with 'Skin em and make a drum.'. Thanks, doll!

Also, I'm on tumblr now.

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Will gets advice, clarification and some helpful information.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Having not eaten since the previous morning, Will is absolutely famished before the sun has even risen. Hannibal will be up soon, he knows. The doctor always seems to rise with the sun, regardless of whether or not he has plans for the day. Though they aren't so much fighting as Will is being (perhaps overly) salty about Hannibal's comments the evening before, the thought of facing the man so soon does not sit well with Will at all. It's just after five when he steals out of his room on light feet, taking care not to creak on the steps on his way down the stairs.

The kitchen at this time of day, particularly without Hannibal in it, has an odd sort of energy. He feels almost as though he is trespassing as he cracks open the fridge and looks for something he can eat quickly and silently. His breath catches, quite against his will, when he sees the wrapped plate on the second shelf. It's a mix of vegetables, quinoa and cut of meat that appears to be loin; Hannibal had cooked for two after all.

Will pulls it out with a sigh, opting for convenience over pride, and shovels the meal into his face cold as he stands over the sink. He sets the plate and fork in the basin gently, knowing that Hannibal will take satisfaction in seeing that Will had accepted his offering. It's irksome that Will can't decide if he likes that or not. Acceptance of food notwithstanding, Will still isn't ready to see or talk to his lover and he's going entirely stir-crazy, having been up already for two hours holed up in his room staring at the same pictures and reports over and over again.

In the dead quiet house he is almost certain he hears the sound of Hannibal stirring upstairs, so despite the fact that he's only in a pair of sweatpants and a white tee, Will slips on his jacket and shoes (sans socks) and plucks the keys to his Volvo off of the key rack on the wall next to the garage door. His hand is on the doorknob when he hesitates. It may not be a fantastic idea to abscond silently; he knows that if the situation were reversed he would go wild with worry at where Hannibal could have run off to. Or whether he intended to return.

With another sigh, Will moves to the small table that houses the base for the cordless phone in the kitchen, pulling out the notepad and pen from the drawer beneath it. He scribbles out a quick note and leaves it on the counter, ducking out into the garage just as he hears Hannibal's shower jet to life.

Hannibal is not accustomed to losing sleep over another person, so when his internal clock jerks his body to the wakening world at its routine time just scant hours after he'd fallen asleep, he knows that he will be beginning this day in a sour mood. A small blessing that he need not feign patience and pleasantness for any patients today. He quite likes having Mondays off, he finds, and considers the value of keeping his schedule as such.

He stretches out in his bed, an involuntary shiver rippling through him as his bare limbs stretch into territory that is cold from the absence of habitation. He glances over to the perfectly plump pillow where no curly head depressed it, the sheets that are still pulled snug on the far side, instead of the chaotic mess they are twisted into by morning when his lover sleeps beside him. Annoyance seeps through him as he regards the sight; wholly unacceptable, though he had agreed at the start of all this that Will would have the option of keeping his own space. He'd just never intended for Will to actually use it.

For decades he has had no trouble whatsoever in finding rest by himself. A few scant weeks of Will in his sheets and one night without him and now Hannibal is somehow hyper-aware of how terribly big and empty his bed truly is. He allows a soft sigh to escape his mouth, rolling over to rise from the bed, setting the sheets on his side to rights before he heads into the en suite. He removes his bedclothes swiftly and disposes of them into the hamper in the corner while he waits for the shower to warm.

He's never been one to place sexual satisfaction as a high priority, but after many weeks of unfettered access to Will and now being denied a source of relief, Hannibal feels a carnal itch beneath his skin; one which he refuses to scratch. He goes through the motions of his wash in a perfunctory manner, his morning turgency deflected by sheer lack of contact and redirected thought (the switching of cold water at the end of his wash doesn't hurt either). Since he presently has no business that will draw him from home, Hannibal dresses casually in a pair of dark charcoal slacks and a red knit cashmere sweater.

When he leaves his room he sees that the door to Will's own is ajar, a far different view than the locked one that had greeted him when he'd retired the night before. He steps up to it on light feet, pushing it inward just enough to be able to glance within. He does not see his lover coiled within the twisted sheets on the bed, but his nostrils flare instinctively as the stale scent of old sweat reaches him, the underlying sourness of fear accompanying it.

It would appear that he was not the only one whose rest was affected. He pushes the door open an inch further, just enough to tilt his head in to see that the door to the adjoining en suite is open as well; Will is not in his room.

Uncommon, for him to be up so early, but not unthinkable, considering the turmoil that appears to be affecting both of them. He makes his way downstairs on silent feet, but he can not sense any presence awake downstairs either. He peeks into the study, to see if perhaps Will had moved to and fallen asleep on the settee he prefers, but he is not there. The kitchen is likewise empty, though it bears evidence of his presence; the plate that he had left of Will's dinner the night before now lays empty in the sink with a single fork. The lingering scent of his lover is heavy in the kitchen, indicating that he was here not long ago.

Not expecting such a thing to exist, it takes a moment for Hannibal to notice the slip of paper that had been left on the counter near the garage door, his pepper mill sitting over one corner to act as a paperweight.

'Went for a walk.
Be back later.
-W'

It's an odd sensation, to be as equally incensed by Will's absence as he is placated by the courtesy of him having left a note at all, but that is where Hannibal finds himself. Perhaps he should not have been so ruthless with the boy; he obviously places a great deal of investment in Hannibal's guidance and praise. But he is ruled by emotion where there should be logic, and while passion is important it must also be schooled, contained, or it will only lead to destruction rather than elevation. These are things that Will needs to learn, and if it must be a tough lesson then it is through no fault but his own.

A jealous little thing, though, Hannibal considers, thinking back on their conversation the previous day. Will all but frothed at the mouth at the thought of Hannibal showing attention to anyone but himself. Hannibal, being Hannibal and therefore entirely unable to help himself, could only provide further fuel for the fire, stoking the flames of Will's fear of inadequacy and abandonment. He had intended for Will to rise to the challenge, seek out and destroy his competition; he had not suspected that his machinations would push his lover away so effectively. Although, perhaps that intent had been present as well; Hannibal's own uncertain wariness in regards to the undeniable ease at which he's let another soul into his life and the unfamiliar desire to keep it there at any cost bleeding through. It appears as though his subconscious may desire a bit of space, to prove that nothing about him has truly *changed*, only adapted to change.

It is a hypothesis that has swiftly been refuted, if his troubled sleep and forlorn mood at waking to an empty house is any evidence.

Will's scent is still strong and stagnant in the room, indicating that he's not been gone long at all. Hannibal suspects that he would still smell the exhaust from Will's Volvo if he ventured into the garage. There's no telling how long Will could be away for--likely awhile, as it seems his intention is to avoid him and he knows that Hannibal has no business to draw him to the office today--but he pulls out ingredients and prepares breakfast for two all the same. If Will had conceded to eating his dinner then Hannibal is certain he will be drawn to his breakfast as well. When he finishes the protein scramble he scoops half onto the plate he intends to eat from and leaves the rest in the pan, storing it in the oven on a 'keep warm' setting.

Will will return, eventually. He has nowhere else to go.

In the meantime, Hannibal sits at a too-empty table in a too-quiet room, as he has for years. There's no reason that the break in routine for the last month should affect him so greatly, but he finds the regression to old habits undesirable all the same. After breakfast (after the kitchen has been put back to order), Hannibal visits his rolodex, opening various doors in his Memory Palace as he flicks through the business cards in search of the appropriate specimen. It is passed time that he sends a message to his would-be suitor. To Will as well.

“Wha--fuck, wh--hello?”

Will can’t help his smile, holding back a laugh at the bewildered and sleep-infused voice on the other end of the line. “Get up. Go to your window, if it faces east. Better yet, get outside. You’re missing an amazing sunrise.”

“I...Will?” Abigail slurs thickly. “I--I think I’m still drunk. What--what the fuck time is it?”

“Time for you to get rid of that ID, it sounds like,” he replies sternly. “Tell me you’ve been safe, at least, and that you’re not using all your money for booze.”

She must not be entirely drunk, because Abigail perks up a bit when she realizes who she’s talking to, snorts at his suggestion of her being so irresponsible. “You gave me two-goddamn-thousand dollars. Do you seriously think I would drink through that in three weeks? Or even that I *could?”*

“I don’t think you could,” Will replies easily, “That’s why I’m worried that you might try. Are you outside? Look at this shit.”

“I--fuck, hang on, I’m still trying to find my pants.” He can hear her labored breathing as she roots around her likely dark room, grunting as she pulls on each article of clothing she can locate. “Where is that keycard…” he hears her murmur to herself. That she’s staying in a hotel respectable enough to use electronic keycards is a relief. He knows that wasn’t always the case before now. “Okay, I’m heading out the front,” she tells him, “Which fucking way is east?” she mutters to herself again.

“It’s the direction the sun is coming from,” Will points out helpfully, and receives a rather rude expletive in response. Abigail has quite the mouth on her first thing in the morning.

“Oh,” she breathes, and Will’s smile expands, picturing the stricken expression that must be frozen on her face if what she is viewing is half as beautiful as what he sees. “Oh, wow. That’s--Will, where are you?”

The shift in tone is so sudden it takes Will aback for a moment. “I’m just out for a walk. My path takes me to this lake and..shit, the colors coming up are just…”

“What’s wrong, Will?”

She doesn’t sound drunk or sleepy anymore; she sounds entirely too cognizant for Will’s own good. He sighs, peering up at the bright pinks and oranges seeping away from the deep purple of the horizon. It’s still early enough that the trees that block the light are more an abstract of dark trunk and dendrites that branch into the lightening sky. “I...I don’t know. We had a fight, I guess. At least I think it was a fight. It might have been more just me blowing up over my own shit and--”

“Will, breathe. Jesus, I can’t--what are you even saying right now?”

“We slept apart,” he chokes out around the lump that has suddenly formed in his throat. “I--We’ve never been apart, not since I got here and--”

“Will--”

“I don’t know what it means,” the words claw up from his throat persistently now, frantic to be voiced, “I’m pissed, but I also feel like maybe I’m fucking this up. I’ve barely been here a month. I don’t...I don’t know what I’ll do if this doesn’t work.”

There’s an extended silence on the other end of the line, finally broken by a soft sigh. “Couples fight, Will, it’s just a part of being in someone’s life that way. You aren’t always going to see eye to eye on things. My parents didn’t bicker often--not when I could hear them at least--but the handful that I remember were all-out blowouts. Screaming matches. It’s...you have to be able to blow off steam now and then. You keep that shit bottled up and it poisons the relationship. You have to have faith that an argument now and then isn’t going to destroy what you’ve been building. A lot of times it makes it stronger, actually.”

Will shifts on the boulder that has been serving as his seat, tugging at his pants to better cover his bare ankles. It’s really too cold to be out dressed the way he is. “How did an eighteen year old end up smarter on relationship stuff than me?”

Her soft laugh warms his heart. “The better question is why you’re calling an eighteen year old for relationship advice in the first place. Go home, Will. It will be fine. And if it’s not… You’ll get by; you always have. If it means coming back to the company or doing something else...you’ll find a way to make ends meet.”

He voices his agreement, though she’s missed the point a bit. He doesn’t know how to explain that it’s not the finances he’s worried about, but losing the connection he’s found with the first person in his life that truly understands him. Makes him happy. He thanks her for her time and help and bids her permission to go back to sleep. He doesn’t move from his rock, though his ass is freezing through the thin sweatpants he’s wearing, but instead stays there staring at the horizon until long after the sun has risen.

The last thing Will expects to see when he arrives home is Hannibal leaving. The garage door opens to reveal the doctor at the door to his Bentley, pausing in the action of opening the door as Will pulls in. Will can’t decide what emotion he feels when, instead of continuing on his course and climbing into the car, Hannibal closes the driver’s side door and steps around the vehicle to Will’s own as he parks. The hopeful joy that begins to bubble up within him when he sees that Hannibal is not avoiding him (unlike Will, who had previously been avoiding Hannibal) is tainted by the dread of facing each other for the first time since his departure from the kitchen the previous evening.

He climbs out of the car and finds himself blushing immediately under Hannibal’s scrutinizing gaze.

“You’re under-dressed,” he states plainly.

Will, freezing though he is (and ever regretful that the Volvo does not have heated seats) gives a casual shrug in response. “I’m fine.” He closes his own door and finds that the two of them are now sandwiched between their two vehicles. Will longs to reach out to the warmth he can feel emanating from Hannibal, denies himself.

Hannibal is not of the same ilk. He presses forward almost immediately, his arms surrounding a still and stunned Will, burying his face into the cold flesh at the crook of Will’s neck and inhaling deeply. For a man that had stated just twelve hours before that Will is little more to him than a bed warmer, he is quite eager to soften Will’s resolve with his intimate gestures.

And Will, hating himself a little, melts into it; because how can he not? The tension that racks his body dissipates immediately and he falls pliant against his lover, his own hands reaching up to grasp at slim hips, his head tilting instinctively to nuzzle against his cheek. A shiver that has nothing to do with the lingering cold ripples through Will at the sensation of Hannibal’s lips ghosting against the flesh of his throat, Will’s head tilting back in a learned fashion that suggests the contact will continue, grow sweeter, if he gives his lover greater access.

The gasp that falls from his lips is as involuntary as it is reactive, helpless to the assault of his lover’s tongue that now dances across the pulse point at the base of his neck with astounding familiarity. “Fuck, I missed you last night,” Will admits with a low moan, his head cast back and his hands clutching, pulling Hannibal towards him with needy desperation. “Come to bed,” he beckons with a breathy sigh.

He shivers again at the hum placed against his skin, the teasing flick of a tongue over his Adam’s apple, and then: “I’m afraid I have work to do.”

Will pulls his head back to regard his lover, the blissful fog clearing from his head in a swift and unpleasant manner. “It’s Monday. You don’t have work.”

“Not of the conventional sort, no,” Hannibal agrees, one hand finding Will’s hip while the other smooths along his jaw. Will chews on this for a moment, and his next thought must be evident in his expression (or Hannibal truly has telepathic powers), because the doctor cuts him off at the pass by continuing on with, “I would invite you along, I know it’s been some time since we’ve worked together, but I think the undertaking of this venture would be more appropriately done alone.”

He pulls away completely then, out of Hannibal’s loose grasp and back against his Volvo, since he has no more room with which to work. He doesn’t even attempt to keep his displeasure from his face or voice. “You’re leaving him something,” Will accuses; accurately, if Hannibal’s answering silence is any indication. Warmth floods Will’s cheek in equal parts ire and humiliation. What a fool he was to allow himself to be drawn into Hannibal’s magnetic grasp, even in spite of his plain words the previous evening. “Great,” he nods, perfectly aware that his tone betrays the very false enthusiasm with which the word is spoken. “Have fun,” he bids coolly, side-stepping from between Hannibal and the car to head into the house.

“Will.”

Everything in him wants to ignore the man, keep moving forward. Will pauses at the threshold, is strong enough at least not to turn back.

“There’s breakfast for you in the fridge. I only just put it in, so it should still be warm.”

He doesn’t know why he was hoping for any kind of apology, or even acknowledgement of his torment. He’s disappointed in himself for even considering it as a possibility. He murmurs his thanks and continues inside, and even though his first thought is to remove the food from the fridge and dump it straight into the bin, moments later Will finds himself instead sitting down at the island and eating it anyways.

Will spends the day alternately napping, reading and poring over the case file. There’s a way to find this killer, he knows, he just has to figure out what exactly that entails. When seven o’clock comes and goes without any sign of Hannibal returning, Will decides with great malice and spite to order in a pizza for dinner. It’s sub-par, overly greasy (causing a soggy crust) with too much cheese and stale processed meats and veggies. It’s the first junk food Will has consumed since he left the company and it is absolutely perfect. He eats nearly the entire thing sitting at the island with his laptop, making a list of all of the music stores in Baltimore and the surrounding suburbs within ten miles; he places the few that he finds that specialize in string instruments or advertise stock of catgut at the top of his list.

There’s only one slice of pizza left but Will leaves it in the grease-saturated cardboard box and shoves the entire thing unceremoniously into the fridge (If it finds a home on top of Hannibal’s precious, delicate, all-organic produce then that’s just fine. He wants to be sure that Hannibal is aware of his transgression, after all.).

By the time he’s ready to retire at just after midnight, Hannibal still hasn’t returned. He hasn’t texted Will with any update either. For the second night since he’d moved to Baltimore, Will climbs into bed-- *his* bed--alone and falls into an uneasy, restless sleep.

When Will finally falls asleep, he dreams that he wakes the following morning to find that Hannibal has not returned, that Hannibal never returns, having been caught in the act of setting up one of his breathtakingly macabre displays by Jack Crawford. When he wakes he is covered in a sheen of sweat, his breath short and his stomach sour.

He’s barely stepped out of the shower when he hears his phone go off in the bedroom. Drying the excess water quickly, he hastens to the nightstand where the phone buzzes.

After Hannibal’s busy day (and night, apparently), he’s not surprised at all to find that it’s Jack Crawford ringing. “Jack,” he greets casually, “Good morning.”

“No, not really,” the agent replies gruffly. “In fact, it’s a pretty shit morning.”

Will gives a sigh, remembers at the last moment that he’s not supposed to know the Ripper has been working. “Is it the Ripper or the Maestro?” he paces back to the bathroom as he talks, retrieving his towel to dab at his dripping curls.

On the other end, Jack gives a pained groan, “Don’t give that hack journalist any more page hits than she’s already getting, *please*, Will,” he heaves a melancholy sigh then, “Almost certainly the Ripper. Looks like he’s finally decided to respond to the *Maestro*,” Jack spits the nickname out like he might gag on it; Will wonders if it’s because acknowledging these killers at all is disgusting to him or if it’s just because Freddie Lounds came up with the name. “Care to take a stab at deciphering the message?”

Will had spent the entire previous day simultaneously irritated and distraught over Hannibal’s absence. His worry increased with the man missing his staunch ‘seven o’clock is dining hour’ custom. His *ire* increased when, come bedtime, he *still* had yet to materialize. He wasn’t feeling entirely refreshed that morning either, having been plagued with nightmares for the few hours he was tossing and turning.

So he’s a bit appalled at himself when the sight of Hannibal in the kitchen, safe, whole, *present,* firmly pushes out every annoyance Will had been clinging to and floods him with relief.

“Late night?” he drawls. To Will’s delight, it almost comes out as though he is uninterested as he plucks up his keys from the rack by the garage door.

“No later than usual,” Hannibal shoots back casually, tossing the contents of his frying pan with nary a glance toward Will. “Breakfast will be ready shortly--”

“I have to go,” Will declines. Spiteful as it is, he’s happy to deny his hunger for the moment if it means denying Hannibal the pleasure of feeding him; Hannibal so enjoys feeding him. “Wouldn’t you know it, someone ensured I actually have work to do today.”

He watches from the corner of his eye as he pulls on his jacket, sees Hannibal stiffen at the dismissal. “Dinner is at seven,” he replies in a clipped tone.

“Great,” Will acknowledges, breezing out the door.

Hannibal lets him go. The boy is fiery and impetuous, but also so clearly tortured by Hannibal’s callousness, so he lets him go.

It did not please him to stay away for another evening, but procuring one of his pigs proved a little more difficult than expected and delayed his machinations by *hours.* He would not have been able to finish and present his work, had he returned home to Will at a decent hour, and so Hannibal persevered until the very early morning, accomplishing only two hours of sleep but also so much more that kept his weary body moving.

Things are awkward and discordant and unpleasant now, but come this evening everything will be back to normal, as long as Will’s terribly wonderful empathy can clue in to what he sought to represent (and Hannibal has every assurance that it can and will).

He finishes cooking breakfast and eats, once again, alone. It's a shame that he actually has patients scheduled for the morning, he would have liked the opportunity to join Will at another crime scene (the fact that it would be his own only a perk). It was quite interesting to observe the boy at the last one; the way he seemed to almost leave himself was enchanting, his bold, unabashed appreciation for the display almost arousing. It was then that Hannibal had decided that he very much wanted Will to see his work in person, was all too happy to seize this opportunity when it presented itself.

Will was hurt that he had taken it; the display was also, in part, for this killer that seems so eager for his attention. He suspects that Will won't feel the same way by the time he's returning home.

The fact that Franklyn Froideveaux is the last patient that Hannibal has to look forward to before lunch does little to stem his eagerness for the day to be done so he can take Will into his arms and devour him once again. He's never considered himself overtly sexual in nature, but something about the boy just draws it out of him. He looks upon Will, with his lean, firm body, his angelic face framed by soft, unruly curls and his wild, tempest-tossed eyes, and he *wants.* Wants to smell and taste and *take.* Wants to devour and be devoured in return.

He had sensed it immediately upon viewing the rough man for the first time; it was what drew him to his game booth, after all. And then that cocky and, somehow still, infuriatingly charming air that had drawn him back… Reflecting on that first day, Hannibal has wondered once or twice if he truly had returned intending to kill the young man. Perhaps Will had enchanted him even then, without him realizing it.

It's apparent as soon as Hannibal opens the door to his waiting room that today is going to be a particularly tiresome appointment with Franklyn. The portly man is a ball of anxiety, pausing mid-pace as he turns through the waiting room and spinning to face his therapist with all the relief of a drowning man being thrown a life preserver.

As customary, Hannibal greets him and invites him inside, his patient shuffling passed him with a distracted murmur of thanks. Franklyn is usually undeniably pleased to enter the sanctuary where for one full hour Hannibal Lecter's attention is only for him; today, he can't seem to decide how he feels. He paces between the chairs for a moment before he sits, immediately beginning a dance of shuffling around to find a comfortable position. He leans back, hands clutching the arm of the chair, folded across the chest, rubbing over the back of his neck. He sits forward, elbows resting on knees, fingers tapping on thighs, face buried in his hands as though that action would allow the rest of himself to be concealed as well.

Hannibal remains silent for a few minutes, watching the display with interest. This is not Franklyn's usual brand of neuroses. Whatever is happening with the man, it is disturbing him greatly and he seems quite uncertain of whether or not he should share it with Hannibal. Just as Hannibal is preparing to inquire about his patient's frantic state, however, Franklyn finally begins.

"My friend, Tobias? We spoke about him a few weeks ago--"

Hannibal nods, exuding calm as his interest is piqued even further. All at once he is sure that he knows what has Franklyn so keyed up. He adjusts his own position in his seat, deftly slipping a hand into his pocket. “I remember. At the time, you seemed to be under the impression that he is a psychopath. Tell me, Franklyn, do you still feel as though this is a possibility?”

Franklyn ignores the question to ask his own, “Do you remember when I said Tobias was saying very dark things?”

“I made a note of it,” Hannibal confirms.

“He’s been talking about writing a new composition. He’s a very talented musician, writes such beautiful pieces. He’s usually happy to share his work--he’s got a bit of an ego, after all, but when I expressed an interest in hearing this new piece he became evasive. He--he keeps saying he hasn’t found the right *instrument* yet.”

Hannibal allows the silence to settle and stretch between them, Franklyn’s unspoken suspicions loud in the absence of sound. Finally, the tension within the man snaps.

“They’ve been finding *bodies* done up as *instruments.* Tobias complained about that trombonist after the last performance we attended. He’s been making those comments--”

The emotional turmoil that has obviously been building within him for weeks sends Franklyn into a tizzy as soon as he begins to vent, his statements rushing from him as his panic grows. It’s the perfect opportunity for Hannibal to exploit. “Franklyn, you’re getting quite worked up. I’d like you to pause for a moment. Close your eyes and take three deeps breaths for me, please. Five seconds in and out.” Franklyn complies and Hannibal’s attention slips to his pocket, pulling his phone to the top just enough so that he can ensure he is calling the correct contact. It wouldn’t do to accidentally dial Jack Crawford, after all.

He can hear the ringing end, the call connecting and the muffled sound of Will beginning to say his name when Franklyn heaves out his last breath in a sigh and opens his eyes.

“I don’t mean to work myself into hysterics,” Franklyn explains sheepishly, “I just...I’m *afraid* that--”

“Do you think Tobias killed those people, Franklyn?”

His patient lets out a squeak of a whine, “If I say yes, does that mean I have to report him?”

Hannibal blinks at that, momentarily surprised that Franklyn actually *surprised* him. “Do you have a reason not to?”

“What if I’m wrong? You know how that kind of accusation, even false, can destroy someone’s reputation. He has a local business, he teaches kids music, and for far less than most people charge. He’s an institution of the neighborhood. If I destroyed his image like that over nothing…”

“I can’t advise you to act one way or another, Franklyn,” Hannibal informs him, recognizing the desperate plea for guidance in his patient’s words and tone. “You have been good friends with Tobias for quite some time now. It is up to your judgement whether or not you deem him capable of such an act. Isn’t it possible, after all, that he is truly only searching for an instrument with which to compose his piece that he is not yet proficient at?”

Franklyn shifts once more, sits up straighter in his chair. “You think my paranoia is leaching into my relationship with Tobias? That I’m reading too much into it?”

“I’m saying that it may be a possibility. Only time will tell, it would seem.”

The nervous man sighs, shifts again, but it seems that he may be placated for the time being. He will not immediately seek to report Tobias to the authorities, making an off-hand comment about seeking clarification from his friend first instead, and that is all Hannibal needs for now.

Will is both surprised and not when the crime scene he is called to is along one of the walking paths that he favors. He’s both annoyed that Hannibal would craft such a display in an area he deems belongs to him and touched that he remembers what the place means to Will. It is a very frustrating thing, to feel feelings for Hannibal. Will wishes he could remain as dispassionate as the older man seems to be, though he knows that would have been a losing battle from the beginning. Hannibal incites things in Will that he never thought possible, gives him the hope that there may be someone out there that can handle, perhaps even *appreciate* his particular brand of crazy.

Any lingering negative feelings that slog through him, weigh him down, dissipate immediately when he turns around a corner shielded by trees and foliage and the tableau comes into view.

All eyes turn to him as he approaches, with varying degrees of emotion. Jack looks an odd mix of harried and relieved, Katz looks intrigued while Zeller is obviously displeased with his presence. Price ignores him entirely, standing still before the display with an expression of curious contemplation. Will ignores everyone else and steps up next to the older man.

There is only one body, but obviously multiple victims. The main point of the display is a Caucasian male, nude, lying on his back with his legs locked together and arms spread out to his sides fully to form a human ‘T’. The body looks relatively untouched except for a chasm in the chest filled with blue flowers where his heart should be. Another set of limbs has been attached to the primary body, legs and arms that each stretch out from the other limbs to form an ‘X’. Surrounding the body are both a perfect square and, overlaying it, a perfect circle, constructed of two more types of plants.

“The Vitruvian Man,” Price declares when he notices Will’s presence beside him.

Will nods as he takes in the display, his eyes lingering on the mop of dark curly hair that spreads out from the man’s head like a halo. He swallows thickly around the lump in his

throat before he speaks. “The proportions of the ideal man reflected in the universe. Any significance to the flowers chosen?”

“Blue zephyr lily traditionally represents mystery, attaining the impossible or love at first sight. Bellflower--that’s the purple square--symbolizes unwavering love. That’s ivy wrapped around in a circle, symbolizes dependence, endurance and faithfulness.” Price recites the meanings in great detail, shrugs and waves the phone clutched in his hand when Will glances over to him. “According to Wikipedia, at least.”

“The Maestro has finally received his response,” Will murmurs, doing his absolute best to quell the rabbiting of his heart as pride, gratitude and relief floods his chest. “It seems the Chesapeake Ripper’s attention is already devoted to someone else.”

“Jack will be thrilled,” Price scoffs sarcastically. “And all the rest of us, trying to puzzle out who might be connected to a killer we have next to no information on.”

Will shrugs at that. “He’s not interested in getting in bed with another serial killer, at least. It’s something. The Maestro is not the Ripper; he’ll give himself away somehow.”

He walks away then, little else to interpret from the scene and nothing else to say to Jimmy Price. He gives Jack a brief recap of what they’ve found, instructs the team to catalogue each individual flower for prints, just in case. He knows it’s useless; Hannibal would never be so careless. “All of the plants are typical to the region, so there’s little to go on that way. Looks like a pretty good match, but we should test samples from each of the limbs, make sure we’re only looking at two vics.”

With nothing else to add, Will leaves. He’s just arrived back at his car when his phone begins to buzz in his pocket. He has mixed feelings about seeing Hannibal’s name on his screen. He feels deep affection, having just viewed his tableau, but the annoyance at his erratic behavior still sits sour within him. After a moment of contemplation, he answers the call.

“Hannibal, I--” he pauses when he hears a muffled voice that is very distinctly *not* Hannibal. He realizes after a moment that it must be one of Hannibal’s patient’s. He’s pocket-dialed Will on accident.

Wary of Hannibal’s sacred doctor-patient confidentiality, Will is about to hang up the phone when he hears Hannibal say, clear as day, “Do you think Tobias killed those people, Franklyn?”

Will pauses then, his finger hovering over the ‘end call’ icon as he listens for further information. Franklyn does, indeed, believe this Tobias person is responsible for the human-based instruments the FBI has been finding around Baltimore. It’s obvious that he’s having trouble reconciling this fact, however, quick to put the fault on himself for being paranoid and neurotic.

This is the clinger patient, Will is certain. Which means that this friend they are discussing--Tobias--is likely the man that was accompanying Clinger at the Hunger Benefit, where they ambushed Hannibal so tactlessly. He’s transported, suddenly, back to that first dinner they shared with Jack Crawford, when they first discussed the Maestro.

‘This feels more intimate,’ he had explained, *‘A serenade. Perhaps he wants to make contact with the Ripper.’*

‘Perhaps he already has,’ Hannibal had responded. A seemingly innocuous comment at the time.

And he had, hadn’t he? He’d met Hannibal at that benefit, either already knowing or soon to know what he was, and that captivated this man enough to begin slaughtering people and creating art in an attempt to entice the Ripper into...what, a partnership? Relationship? Will’s lips curl back to bare his teeth at the mere thought that someone else, someone *not himself* could think themselves worthy of Hannibal’s attention and affection. Hell, Will *had* those things and he *still* didn’t quite consider himself worthy of them.

Distracted in his own thoughts as he was, he almost missed the important information being thrown right into his face. This Tobias person owns an instrument shop, teaches lessons to the local children. Will ends the call and pulls up his search bar to enter the keywords ‘Tobias’, ‘Baltimore’, ‘music lessons’.

He finds the store the man owns immediately. And how convenient: it happens to be the third on his list of prospective interviews.

His arrival is heralded by the jingling of a bell and Will scowls and glances skyward, reaching up to silence the offending alarm. He slips the rest of the way into the shop, freezing for a moment to attune himself to the sounds in the building; or lack thereof, as fate would have it. He steps further in slowly, passing from one empty room into another. There are stringed instruments lining the edges of the room, displays of sheet music and coils of string in one corner. There doesn’t seem to be any workers present, but there is a door in the far corner of the room that is cracked open.

Will makes his way over to it slowly, ears attuned to the area surrounding him while his eyes scan for more doors, rooms, exits. The space that stands open behind the door is dark; Will can see that it leads to a basement, but little else. He presses forward, slipping through the gap without disturbing the position of the door and taking step after unsure step into the deep darkness of the staircase. There’s light at the bottom, he can see, but it’s not until halfway down the stairs that it reveals anything to him.

The first thing that catches his eye is the shelves of jars filled with some kind of solution and, Will is betting, the intestines from the last few murder cases and who knows how many more. The second thing he spots is a man--Franklyn, he presumes, given the fact that he had earlier told Hannibal of his intentions to confront his friend--splayed out on the floor on his back; he’s gasping and wheezing in pain, one hand wrapped around his round belly, protecting the bowels that were in the process of being removed. The other hand is reaching out toward Will, the man’s shocked, desperate eyes locked on him.

Will ducks his head down to glance around the rest of the basement but sees no one else. He puts one finger to his lips to infer to the man that his presence should not be noted, takes another step down--

And then a hand darts out from between the stair slats beneath him, wraps around his ankle and *tugs*.

And then Will is tumbling forward and down.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this took so long to get out. Adult life has been ridiculous lately!

Ever-present reminder that I am now on tumblr, because my husband insists that I should be promoting myself. (The link actually works now!)

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Hannibal receives a wake up call and a scolding.

Chapter Notes

My darlings, I am so very sorry this took so long to get out.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will ducks his head down to glance around the rest of the basement but sees no one else. He puts one finger to his lips to infer to the man that his presence should not be noted, takes another step down--

And then a hand darts out from between the stair slats beneath him, wraps around his ankle and tugs.

And then Will is tumbling forward and down.

Though he's seized by surprise, Will manages to twist his body so that his shoulder takes the brunt of the impact as he strikes the stairs and rolls the rest of the way down. Dazed as he is, he still manages to kick his leg up and out as his attacker attempts to fall upon him, sending the man down onto his own back as Will struggles to right himself quickly.

His right shoulder screams in protest when he attempts to lift or roll it. Though a quick pat from his left hand proves it not to be dislocated, he can do little more than hold it against his body without pain. A grave disadvantage, to be without his dominant arm. Or a weapon of any sort. Sharp blue eyes dart around the room frantically in search of the latter while Will twists his body to face his assailant, ready for the man to rise and continue fighting.

"The *Maestro,* I presume," he spits out, still looking for an advantage as the man pushes himself to his feet. Feet that are bare, Will notices; perhaps to remain silent as he moves. He turns to the shelf next to him, picking up one of the large jars of floating intestines, gritting through the pain in his shoulder as he raises it as high as possible and sends it crashing down to shatter on the ground between them; just under the sound of glass Will can hear the mess of intestines plop to the floor with a wet *squelch* that turns his stomach. An indefinable pungent odor floods the room, makes Will's nose and eyes sting. The broken glass should give the man pause, buy Will a bit of time. "I can't blame you for wanting to go after the Ripper," he admits as he takes a step back, toward the far wall lined with sinks. They eye

each other, steps mirrored as they circle slowly. “Unfortunately for you, he’s already spoken for.”

The thin man snarls at that, white teeth flashing against his dark skin. “There’s no accounting for poor taste,” he bites out coldly. And his voice, his dark eyes, are so entirely devoid of *anything* that Will is certain he’d have known this man was a killer even if he’d been greeted amicably upstairs in the shop. “I can train him away from that though. I’ll give him your guts for his harpsichord; I’m sure he’ll warm up eventually.”

The sheer notion of anyone *training* Hannibal is so ridiculous Will could laugh; but the mention of Hannibal’s harpsichord, the allusion to Tobias knowing him personally, sends a spark of rage flaming through him. “He’s *mine,”* he hisses lowly. “Just because you broke your toy doesn’t mean you get to take things that don’t belong to you.” He nods down to Franklyn, who has lost an alarming amount of blood. He’s growing pale, trembling on the floor, still clinging to his guts. “Rather selfish of you to try to take his bowels when he’s so clearly still using them. And you’ve already got so *many--”*

He glances around him, waving his left hand vaguely at the grotesque workshop, and unfortunately it’s all the distraction Tobias needs. He bolts forward, unheeding of the broken glass against his bare feet, brandishing the knife that he had previously been using on poor Franklyn. Will catches on just in time to stumble back against the sink, avoiding a vicious swipe across his belly.

Unfortunately for him, Franklyn’s blood has spilled wide across the floor, and his sudden retreat meets slick ground, his feet slipping out from beneath him so that he must throw both hands back to clutch the lip of the sink to remain standing. This leaves him with no limbs to protect his torso and when Tobias strikes forward again, his blade sinks home. The intuitive twisting of his torso to present a smaller target (and ensuing skid on the slippery floor) causes the blow to land higher up on his side rather than the vulnerable flesh of his soft belly, the frantic headbutt Will delivers the only difference between a single point of penetration and being gutted where he stands.

He growls then, completely fed up with this would-be successor, and falls forward onto him, the bulk of his weight pinning down the man’s lower half and his hands reaching to grasp at his wrist, twisting until his grip loosens on the blade clutched in his hand.

“Hannibal is *mine,"* Will snarls. With both of his hands looking to disarm Tobias’ right, he cannot block the punches and scratches that fall against his face and neck from the killer’s flailing left arm. He grins against the attack, an expression that turns more into the baring of teeth when he finally pries the blade free and sinks it into the lean man’s gut. Tobias’ breath leaves him in a shocked gasp, the sound mostly covered by the sound of the blade slicking into him again as Will hisses, “*Mine* .” The word falls like a mantra from his lips, almost losing its meaning in repetition as Will thrusts the blade down again and again with increasing viciousness.

Finally, Will collapses backwards, dropping the blade and bringing his left hand up to his side when a sharp pain flares through him. Glancing down, he can see that he’s leaking a surprisingly steady flow of blood from where the knife caught him earlier. In front of him,

Tobias' body twitches through its last throes of death; beside him, Franklyn is still quivering, attempting to form coherent speech.

"Ha--Han--*Han--?"* One arms clutches tighter against his abdomen, as if mere pressure will diminish the damage, while the other flails out to grasp at Will's leg. "Hannib--"

"Hannibal is the Chesapeake Ripper," Will confirms softly, tugging his leg back out of the man's reach. He can't help the cruel smile that spreads across his lips as fresh horror eclipses Franklyn's pale face. "And it looks like I might be needing some assistance, so if you could die a bit faster I'd be much obliged."

Franklyn hasn't the energy to speak further and not much later his body falls limp. Will waits until he is certain both men are dead and then pulls the cell from his pocket--luckily unharmed from his tumble down the stairs and ensuing scuffle. It's fortunate that he's already got Jack's number set to his speed dial, because by the time he's ready to dial the pain has morphed from a stinging burn to an all out inferno raging through his torso, and whether from the pain or from blood loss, he's beginning to feel a bit woozy in the head.

"Jack," he grunts in greeting. "Maestro...Tobias Budge. S-send ambulance," he glances over at the two bodies swimming in his fading vision, "and coroner."

He can't be certain if he says the name of the shop or just thinks it before darkness takes him.

Despite the fact that he and Will are still on ill terms, Hannibal is quite pleased with the way the day has progressed. Will has seen his gift by now and, unless he is severely underestimating the boy, should understand well enough his place in Hannibal's life. And then unfortunate Franklyn, who has perhaps never done a useful thing in his miserable life, was kind enough to bequeath all the knowledge his darling should need in a most conveniently expository manner. If Will had listened in to the conversation even in part--and Hannibal is certain that he had--then he would have all the information he needed about the Maestro. What he chose to do with that information was anyone's guess, though Hannibal is certain that the unabashed jealousy and anger Will has been displaying of late is quite a telling indicator.

To top things off, his sole appointment for the afternoon needed to cancel due to a family emergency; one which, if true, would be excuse enough for a short-notice cancellation and save his patient from ending up on a menu.

He decides to take advantage of this unexpected free time by visiting his butcher--his *actual* butcher--to find something special for dinner. Lamb, he thinks, would suit. Yes, pistachio-crusted rack of lamb with rosemary potatoes. He's just finished running the pistachios and seasoning through the processor when the doorbell sounds.

Hannibal pauses in front of the open fridge, the hand reaching for his lamb frozen in surprise and curiosity. He can't fathom who could possibly be at the front door. Will has a key, and would more than likely come in through the garage. Alana is the next most likely culprit for an unannounced visit, but she and Margot are meant to be in Prague on holiday for the week.

He pushes the door shut, leaving the lamb waiting within, and heads to his front door instead.

It is a day for surprises, it seems, for the last person Hannibal expects to see on his doorstep is an unknown FBI agent.

His expression is schooled, stone, unreadable--it must be. He cocks a single brow to convey his curiosity. “May I help you?”

The uniformed man shuffles from foot to foot, runs a nervous hand along the back of his neck in a gesture that reminds him shockingly greatly of Will. “Dr. Lecter?”

“Yes,” Hannibal confirms, adjusts his grip on the open door discreetly so that he is all that is visible in the doorway. “Is there something I can do for you?”

The young man swallows nervously, shuffles on his feet again; a rookie. “I’m sorry to disturb you, Doctor--Jack Crawford sent me to collect you.”

That gets his attention; he stiffens at the phrasing, despite his best efforts. “I have not heard from Jack, so I am afraid I am not quite in the loop. Could you fill me in as to why I need collecting?”

“Yeah, Jack’s...Jack’s pretty busy. They found the Maestro and apparently it was a complete shitshow. Sounds like you know one of the deceased? I’m sorry I--I was just sent to take you to the hospital.”

Hannibal’s blood runs cold, his entire world halting on the single descriptor of ‘deceased’. His subtle manipulations and machinations seem to splinter and shatter before his eyes. He had intended to push Will toward Tobias, certainly, his disposal of the amateur a telling mark of Will’s loyalty and devotion. He would not, however, have done so if he had considered for one moment that Will would not be up for the task; he loathes to think that Will could be brought down by such a man.

He considers their most recent interaction that morning, Will flippant and snide as he declined breakfast and jetted off to his crime scene. Perhaps if Hannibal had entreated him to stay, just for awhile; to have breakfast at least and perhaps hear him out. Perhaps Will had not quite understood the message that, Hannibal felt, he had so clearly left with his display. Perhaps when he went to face Tobias he felt as though he had nothing to lose…

“Dr. Lecter?”

Hannibal blinks back to reality, straightening under the gaze of this rookie agent on his doorstep. “Yes, apologies, I’m just a bit taken aback. I can join you now, if you just allow me to retrieve my coat.”

For the first time since he can recall in at *least* the last two months--since he met Will--Hannibal folds in on himself; empathy is replaced by apathy, humanity replaced by the cold, calculated knowledge that there is truly nothing of noted uniqueness or importance in any one given person. Hannibal folds in on himself and regresses to nothing more than a beast, cold

and alone and *hungry* in the woods; a boy of ten years of age and privy to the cruelty of man that most have the good fortune to never witness.

When he returns to the agent in his coat and shoes he is stoic, cold, ready to face a sight which, within him, is threatening to tear him apart. Surely if Will was killed by a neophyte such as the Maestro then he was not at all what Hannibal had assumed. Surely he was not worth his thought and grief if *Tobias* could dispatch of him. These thoughts flow unhindered through his mind, making more and more sense with each passing moment--

And then Hannibal recalls soft eyes and desperate hands, bruising lips and yielding flesh. He recalls that Will belongs to *him,* and if any killer other than himself has ushered Will from this life to the next, they best begin praying that the devil catches up to them before Hannibal does.

That thought gives him pause, Hannibal returning to the present situation to note that he is in the passenger's seat of an FBI SUV, houses and trees flashing across the window beside him.

"You said 'one of the deceased'. The Maestro--" he begins, and the agent in the driver's seat--Hannibal never quite caught his name--begins to nod confirmation.

"Dead. Tobias Budge, I think they said his name was. Owned a string shop or something like that--that's how they found him, doing interviews. There was an agent and a civilian present--sorry, but I don't think they ever told me which the casualty was. I imagine it's not hard for you to piece together, at least; they told me the deceased has you listed as an emergency contact."

Hannibal bristles at the rookie's flagrant disregard for the sensitivity of such a delicate situation; showing up on Hannibal's doorstep unannounced and uninformed, casually spouting off that someone he knows has died but showing no sympathy for the matter and, even worse, expressing no remorse for his lack of knowledge.

Emergency contact...surprising that Will would have the foresight to cast him as such but not unthinkable. It would have been a standard field to fill in on his FBI training academy application. Had Will sent that in yet? Somehow Hannibal can't recall. There had been a new employee form as well, when Will went on the Bureau's payroll; that would have inquired about an emergency contact...

They arrive at John Hopkins and the agent does little more than pull up to the front entrance and put the car into park; no move to escort Hannibal within, no muttered condolences. Hannibal makes sure to get the agent's name before he departs and heads inside. He heads straight for the nurse's station, waiting patiently as one of the nurses passes off a patient file to another and explains what needs to be checked.

"Dr. Hannibal Lecter," he announces himself when the blonde finally turns her attention to him and inquires as to what he needs. "I was just brought in by the FBI. It seems an acquaintance of mine was brought into the morgue this afternoon."

Recognition sparks in the nurse's green eyes, much to Hannibal's relief, quickly followed by the shadow of pity casting them darker. "I was told you to direct you to the morgue--"

“I’m familiar with the layout, unless the morgue has moved since my days of surgical residency.”

She grants him a soft smile at that; her eyes retain their distant pity but sharpen as her gaze sweeps over him quickly in an appraising manner. They linger on his left hand, likely noting the absence of any ring there, and then pull back up to his face. “Still where it’s always been,” she confirms. “But if you need anything, just ask for Leah.”

Her smile turns coy when his gaze settles on her badge, bearing the same name. He thanks her and continues on to the elevators, down to the basement level and through the winding corridors that lead to the morgue.

In his mind he strides through a similar maze of hallways, breezing by doors that lead to operas, museums, Paris, Rome, Madrid. He steps and turns until he is upon one of the newest wings of his Memory Palace, the one devoted to a man that is somehow both soft and rough, tender and vicious. A nymph with perfect dark curls and a cherubic face that could make Botticelli weep, his innocence only masked by a fine and constant layer of dark scruff (and Hannibal will regret that he never had the opportunity to take a straight razor to the boy, to witness with eyes and lips and fingers and tongue the smooth cheeks beneath).

He stands before the wing of Will Graham and considers whether or not he wishes to enter it one more time. He’s surprised to find himself imagining that it may be too painful. What a wonderfully incendiary boy, to force pain and grief and regret--emotions long silenced--when no other could. Hannibal swallows around the lump forming in his throat, places a bolt across the closed doors and turns away. Shutting him in is the only way, for now at least. Perhaps, in time, he could visit.
His mind strays, just for a flicker of a moment, to his darling Mischa, and he knows he never will.

The medical examiner is a long and gaunt man; well into his fifties, Hannibal would guess. He is greeted as soon as he enters, this employee seemingly expecting him as well. Perhaps Leah had called ahead. Hannibal is glad to see that the staff at John Hopkins are far more competent than the FBI rookie that collected him.

He’s led to the drawer the body has been stored in, and Hannibal can’t help but wonder as to what he will find when the door is opened to him. What fate befell his dear Will, in the end? Did Tobias claim his guts before he himself succumbed to death?

The door is pulled open, the table withdrawn from within--

And Hannibal has never been more overjoyed to see Franklyn Froidevaux.

In the span of a heartbeat he is forced to recalculate every assumption and emotion processed since he opened his front door an hour previous. Franklyn is the deceased. Franklyn is the one that had Hannibal listed as an emergency contact (this is, in and of itself, not surprising, Franklyn being an orphan and an only child and entirely too engrossed with Hannibal).

Perhaps he can assume, then, that Will is alive. Perhaps Will was not even involved in the whole mess. The airy and blazing sensation of hope that swells within his very core sheds

more light still on the disconcerting clarity that Hannibal can no longer deny:

He is far more than simply fond of Will Graham.

“Will Graham,” he only realizes he is rasping out the name when the ME turns a confused glance upon him.

“Franklyn Froidevaux, according to his identifica--”

“Was a Will Graham also admitted?” Hannibal interrupts, quite rudely he must admit, though he cares little for propriety at the moment.

“If he was, he’s not down here,” the balding man informs him. “You’ll have to check with the nurse’s station on that one. First, though, can you confirm--”

“Yes, Franklyn Froidevaux,” he interrupts again, but how could he *possibly* allow this man to finish drawling out his inane questions when every cell of Hannibal’s being is pulsing, itching, *aching* to set eyes upon Will once again. To make sure… “A patient of mine. Quite an unfortunate end. I apologize, but I must--”

“Go, go,” the ME waves him off in a way that, normally, Hannibal might find unforgivably rude. At this moment, he knows that the examiner is likely quite privy to his current train of thought. Will is the most important. All that matters is finding Will.

With the medical examiner’s charitable dismissal, Hannibal sets out to do just that.

The nurse’s station is empty when Hannibal returns to it, and he has to wait several long, frustrating minutes for someone to return so he can ask to speak to Leah. The woman seems to be quite taken with him, more than happy to divulge classified information despite Hannibal being neither spouse nor family.

She informs him that Will was, in fact, admitted with a stab wound to his upper left quadrant. When the ultrasound showed internal bleeding and some damage to his spleen, they took him took him straight to an OR. Hannibal declines her offer to inquire about an update--Will was admitted nearly three hours ago and, if the damage is as minor as it sounds, with even semi-capable surgeons he shouldn’t be much longer at all. He does, however, inform her that he will take care of any required paperwork and expresses his desire to see Will assigned to a private room.

Hannibal does what he can, and then he waits.

As much as he laments the fact, Hannibal cannot pretend he is not entirely relieved when Will’s lead surgeon tells him that the spleen itself sustained only mild damage and the bleeding in his abdomen was typical enough for such a wound and easy to control. They wish to keep him admitted for two days to administer a round of IV antibiotics and monitor his condition, but overall it seems as though he will make a complete recovery.

His curls are impossibly dark against the white linens of the hospital bed, as is the delicate fan of eyelashes against his cheeks. Tobias fought back, it seems, for there are a series of pink lines gouged down Will's throat that stand out starkly against his blood-drained skin. He looks peaceful, though, in a way that somehow can't be put down to the drugs keeping him asleep; almost as though he knows that he was victorious and can celebrate that fact even while unconscious.

He's still under from the anesthesia when Jack Crawford comes calling. Hannibal apprises Jack of the situation where Will is concerned, and then there is an awkward moment of silence wherein both men stare at the unconscious patient.

"What happened, Jack?" Hannibal finally asks.

Jack heaves an irritated sigh, rubbing one hand over his face and shrugging, shifting restlessly around the room. "That's what I would like to know. It seems Will took it upon himself to do some interviews--never told *me* he had any damn leads. He must have stumbled upon the killer, spooked him…" The expression on Jack's face as he stands over Will's bed is one of wary contemplation. "How well do you know Will, Dr. Lecter?"

Hannibal's gaze slides from Jack to Will, wondering the same thing. "To be honest, we are newer acquaintances. We met while Will was in town for the carnival and seemed to bond quite quickly. When Will expressed an interest in leaving the road and pursuing his education in earnest I offered him a place to stay until he could get on his feet."

"Am I correct in assuming that you wouldn't offer up a room in your home to a relative stranger if you thought at all that there was a possibility he was unstable?"

Hannibal bristles at the question, his eyes trained on Will's still form. "Certainly not. I'm a fairly good judge of character, as you might suspect from my profession. I have encountered no moment wherein I thought Will might be a danger to me or even himself. He is a remarkably peculiar boy, with that empathy of his, but I see that ability only as an asset."

Another heavy minute of silence and then Hannibal must know why Jack is pursuing this line of questioning. "What are you thinking, Jack?"

The bulky man sighs again, more weary than irritable this time. "I'm thinking that a civilian I pulled in for a mere consult on a case decided to go rogue and chase his target with an unusually dogged determination. I'm thinking that I now have on my hands a killer we can't prosecute, a bystander that was gutted, and an officially unofficial FBI consultant fresh out of surgery."

"If Will's life was in danger, I'm sure instinct kicked in to protect himself at all costs. The human body can sustain a substantial amount of trauma before it shuts down, but the mind may act entirely differently when presented with fight or flight. In regards to Franklyn: as it turns out, he was close friends with Tobias Budge and had informed me just that morning during our session of his intention to pay the man a visit at his shop. There was little he could have done for him; he was likely dead before Will even arrived."

Jack turns to him, leveling him with a hard stare. “He stabbed Budge ten times. Does that sound like something that you would label as fight or flight? In your professional opinion.”

Ten times. What a wonderfully vicious boy he has found. All at once, Hannibal begins considering ways to reward his jealous little thing. Perhaps he can coax him into a new car. Or a vacation. It would be quite a sight to see Will bare and sun-kissed on a beach at sunset.

“A tad overkill, perhaps, from an outside perspective, but still entirely reasonable in an adrenaline-fueled fight for survival.”

“All the same,” Jack responds with a haste that suggests it was not up for debate at all, “I would like Will to undergo a psychological examination if he’s to continue freelancing for the Bureau. ...Is that something you think you could do on an unbiased, professional level?”

An ironic inquiry, considering that had been the initial suggestion that had swayed Will into accepting Hannibal’s offer to return to Baltimore. And also because it was becoming painfully clear that, where Will is concerned, Hannibal seems to be the absolute farthest thing from unbiased.

“Undoubtedly.”

Some time after Jack has departed, Will stumbles into a brief and hazy bout of anesthesia-laced consciousness. His lovely lips twist into an unguarded grin when he spots Hannibal sitting in a chair at his side, and he flops his arm toward the edge of the bed, palm up to silently call for Hannibal’s hand. When their fingers lock together, Will mumbles something groggily (or attempts to) but the only word Hannibal can pick out before the boy’s eyes slide shut again is ‘daddy’.

Hannibal sits dutifully by his side, Will’s callus-roughed hand cradled in both of his until he wakes in earnest and pulls it away to rub at his face. They regard each other silently for a moment, Will’s stormy blue eyes passing over the tube connecting his flesh to the IV beside him and then settling back upon Hannibal’s eyes. It’s a tad disconcerting, that he can’t quite work out what Will is turning over in his mind as he studies him.

“Clinger is dead,” he begins.

“Yes,” Hannibal nods, not even attempting to feign pity at that fact. “As is the Maestro. Quite undoubtedly, Jack tells me.”

Will smacks his dry mouth, his tongue working to wet his lips. Hannibal retrieves the glass of water he’d had waiting by his side and guides the straw home. Will takes a few small, slow sips before he releases the plastic pipeline from his lips and eases his head back down to the pillow. “I kept stabbing until he stopped moving.”

“Generally effective, as strategies go. Statistically speaking.”

If Will is amused by Hannibal's comment he makes no effort to show it. "We need to talk and I don't want to do it here. Get me out, please."

In any culture, any language, people understand the universal, panic-inducing implications of the phrase 'we need to talk'. Though Hannibal himself has even heard the phrase a time or two, it has never affected him in the way it seems to so completely affect anyone else that is subjected to the dreadful idiom. Until now. He pushes the concern aside, focusing on the medical disadvantages of Will's desire rather than the potential personal ones.

"Your doctor would like you under observation for at least two days. They are administering a course of antibiotics intravenously--"

"You're a damn doctor, are you not?" he snaps back. "You observe me. I'll leave AMA, take the antibiotics orally, I don't care just--" Will sighs, his head sinking further down into the pillow and his eyes clamping shut for a moment. When he speaks again the hard edge in his tone has faded but the desperation remains; he opens his eyes again and blinks wearily up at him. "Please just get me out, Hannibal."

And, as he has begun to find he is wont to do when Will makes a request, Hannibal complies.

They try to fight it, but Hannibal works whatever magic he has that causes him to always get his way and, in the end, the medical staff relents and discharges Will AMA. They send him off reluctantly with his round of antibiotics, a bottle of Vicodin and strict instructions to return at the first sign of infection. Hannibal calls them a car, explaining his arrival via FBI escort earlier, and Will allows him to assist him in sliding into the backseat.

He rests his head against the leather seat, his eyes closed and his breathing slow and steady to keep him from gnashing his teeth against the pain. Whatever they'd had him on before seems to be wearing off quite quickly, and though the low burning throb in his torso is rapidly morphing into a sickening searing, and though a fine sheen of sweat has broken out across his skin, Will refuses to crack open the bottle of pain meds. Not yet. He needs to get home first, needs to be able to speak freely with Hannibal before he can allow himself to sink back into that pleasant haze.

Hannibal allows him space and silence, though Will can feel his displeased gaze sweep over him every time the car jolts and Will clamps his lips tighter on each hiss of pain that threatens to spill out.

"I would like you to settle in to bed and rest, at least, if you insist on being home," Hannibal starts in as soon as they pass over the threshold.

Will shakes his head, "The study. First we have a drink and a chat, and *then* we can discuss which bedroom to get me settled into."

Hannibal retains his new pattern of pliancy and doesn't argue, something for which Will is grateful as he leans against the strong frame beside him for support until he can sink into one of the plush armchairs by the fireplace.

Gratefulness turns to suspicion when Hannibal does not even attempt to argue from a medical standpoint what an entirely terrible decision it would be to flood his compromised body with hard liquor. Will takes a sip of the amber liquid, relishing the burn in his throat overtaking the one in his side, and frowns at Hannibal over the top of his tumbler.

Hannibal does that thing where his head tilts just slightly to the side and he seems to slip right in to Will's train of thought. "I thought you were dead." Ah. Guilt then, or remorse, pulling Hannibal to accommodate Will in whatever way requested.

He doesn't scoff, though he wants to. The Good Lord himself couldn't fault Will his lack of sympathy. "One would assume that possible conclusion would have crossed your mind when you decided to goad me into hunting down a killer."

"In fact, it did not," Hannibal admits, swirling the scotch in his own tumbler lazily. "Not until the very moment arrived in which it appeared to have concluded just so. I did not consider Tobias Budge on a level anywhere nearing your own."

"I don't need your flattery," Will informs him shortly, taking another sip from his glass. "I don't even need your reasoning. I know why you did it. Why you turned cold, pretended to turn your attention elsewhere." He knocks back the rest of his scotch and sits forward quickly, elbows resting on spread knees and the crystal-cut tumbler dangling precariously between them. He ignores the screaming protest in his side, pushes the pain away and levels Hannibal with a hard glare.

"I don't know what I'd done to earn your distrust. Perhaps I'd done nothing and you're simply distrustful by nature. But I wasn't holding back and I don't appreciate my affection and devotion being *tested* because I failed to meet whatever silent standards you were holding me to. I appreciate being manipulated even less."

Silence reigns between them for one long, tense minute. Hannibal studies him, almost like he's trying to figure out how serious Will is about all this. "I'm afraid all I can offer you is an apology, dear Will."

"How about an assurance that you won't do it again?"

His lover nods. "It was...a miscalculation on my part. One which I do not intend to repeat."

Will is relieved when he peers into amber eyes and senses that Hannibal is being genuine. He sinks back into the chair with a sigh that turns to a hiss, wincing as pain shocks through his torso again.

"Darling--please take some painkillers. And let me get you upstairs."

His pain is distressing Hannibal; Will is glad to witness it. He relents, placated by Hannibal's earnest regret and by the memory of the tableau he had left for him. He takes the proffered medication and falls pliant against Hannibal's warm chest as the older man gathers him up gingerly and carries him upstairs to the bedroom; just as he had the first night they had spent together. He recalls laying in the warm bath, Hannibal strong and solid against his back, letting murmured assurances from the enamored killer wash over him, tempt him. The last

few days have felt too long, too cold, with the weight of fear pressing down upon him. The fear that this was ending, and so very soon. The fear that he was replaceable. The fear that Hannibal, enamored as he'd been when they'd first met, had seemingly broken out of his infatuation overnight.

"Our room," Will directs when Hannibal pauses at the top of the stairs. "I still think you're an asshole," he informs him with a groan as he's settled onto the impossibly comfortable bed. Will's own is adequate but nowhere near this decadent. He imagines the next time they have a tiff he'll just have to claim this bedroom instead and send Hannibal elsewhere.

"Fair enough," Hannibal agrees, and the warmth in his voice--relief, perhaps, at getting out from under Will's ire with just a mild scolding--floods insistently through Will's chest. He reaches out to catch the man's wrist before he can move away.

"Stay with me."

He closes his eyes, finally succumbing to the exhaustion that has wracked his body since he woke in the hospital room. Or perhaps that's the pleasant numbness from Vicodin taking effect already, making him feel hazy, heavy. He can hear Hannibal comply, though, slipping off his jacket and moving to the other side of the bed, can feel the mattress dip as he cautiously takes his place curled against Will's right side.

"Where else would I go?"

Less than a minute later there is the soothing comfort of long fingers making a slow, familiar trek through his curls. Moments after that, Will is asleep.

Chapter End Notes

RIP Franklyn. :(

I'm on Tumblr and now I'm obsessed with Hannibal AND Good Omens. Yay!

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Hannibal attempts to make amends with Will; Will receives a phone call and a house call.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Over the next few days, Hannibal is attentive almost to a fault. He insists that Will remain on bed rest for at *least* the two days the hospital would have had him admitted. He brings him only broth at first, and then eventually some horrendously pretentious version of chicken soup in which the chicken meat is actually *black* and there's other bits of stuffing floating about in it that are meant only for aromatics or aesthetics.

When Will begs for a bath, Hannibal obliges him--but instead of being carried into the en suite to sink into a hot bath (of which Will had been fantasizing), Hannibal sits at the bedside with a bowl of tepid water and a sponge and wipes him down in a clinically efficient manner. When Will begins to harden at the attention to his groin (it's been several days since they were last intimate, after all, and they had heretofore been having sex like it was going out of style), his self-proclaimed nurse actually *scowls* at him, brusquely informing him that he's in no state for any physical exertion.

Will spends the rest of his sponge bath sulkily explaining that lying still and having his dick sucked could *hardly* be counted as physical exertion, but Hannibal just spouts out some nonsense about orgasms and the tensing of abdominal muscles and after several minutes of enduring the pompous lecturing Will gives up the whole thing as a lost cause so Hannibal will stop tempting him to punch him right in the gob.

He's so entirely bored by the afternoon of the second day (though Hannibal had taken time from his patients to see after Will, he was spending all his time in the kitchen working on his ridiculously extravagant creations rather than entertaining him) that it's actually a relief when he receives an angry phone call.

"What the Hell are you doing getting stabbed, you idiot?"

His lips twist into a wry smile at her annoyance and Will abandons the book he'd barely been reading on his bedside nightstand. "Hello, Abigail."

"I thought you were supposed to be in Baltimore going to school and getting your brains screwed out."

"That really *was* the plan--"

“Tell me *why* you’re getting stabbed by serial killers then?” she prompts with a huff.

Will picks at a loose thread at the corner of his blanket with his free hand as he launches into an educational ramble. He gives it a pull and the condition worsens by about half an inch. Whoops. “Technically he wasn’t a serial killer. It’s got to be at least three murders with a cooling off period between--” he stops short in his explanation, “How do you even know about this?”

“You’re famous, idiot. Get on Tattlecrime.”

Will sighs, glancing around for his laptop. Hannibal had moved it when he brought him lunch...Christ’s sake, it’s sitting on the dresser on the other side of the room. Will slips his legs off the bed and moves to stand, using his free hand to push himself up. He winces at the tug in the stitches on his side and lets out a low curse when he realizes one of his legs is asleep.

“Will?”

“Yeah, hang on, damn. I’m just--shit--” he freezes mid-step at the foot of the bed, his eyes locked on the doorway that no longer sits empty. Dropping the phone to his side for a moment, Will clears his throat. “I, uh, I was just--” he gestures to the laptop but the rest of his explanation turns to ash on his tongue under the weight of Hannibal’s withering glare.

“Need I consult Merriam-Webster? Clearly the definition of ‘bed rest’ has changed since I was a surgeon, or you wouldn’t be walking about the room.”

Feeling cowed, and annoyed for it, Will motions to his laptop once more. “I could check dictionary.com if you want--”

“*Bed*,” Hannibal bites out, and it’s incredible how one noun can send a shiver rippling through Will. His doctor watches him with sharp eyes (as though he expects Will may try to make a break for it) as he limps back to the head of the bed and gingerly sits down and settles in. He pulls the blanket back up around him, too late recalling the loose thread he’d managed to make worse. When Hannibal’s eyes dart to the spot before Will can nonchalantly place his hand over it, Will clears his throat again and raises the phone to his ear.

“I’m gonna have to call you back, kid,” he doesn’t wait for her reply before he hangs up and drops the phone to the bed next to him. He waits for a moment, and when the beratement doesn’t begin immediately, Will thinks he may be getting off the hook. He does his best to pull pleading puppy-dog eyes without looking too obvious about it, pushing his bottom lip into the slightest pout. “Could you please get me my laptop?”

Hannibal stares at him a moment longer before complying. Will is pleased when he delivers the computer to his lap and then climbs onto the bed to settle in beside him. Will leans to the side to rest his weight against him, sighing contently when a strong arm slips between his back and the pillows he’s sitting against to curl around his side. He boots up the laptop, nuzzling into Hannibal’s shoulder as he waits for the machine to load.

“Have I been neglecting you, darling?” the words are murmured into the curls just above his ear, Hannibal’s other hand sliding over to stroke along the side of Will’s thigh. He burns in every place Hannibal touches, but attempts, for his own sake, to quell his desire. Hannibal still doesn’t think him strong enough to have sex. Will is done arguing the fact that he wasn’t even that seriously injured and could give a shit if he happens to tear his stitches, but apparently Hannibal isn’t willing to risk it.

He tries to remind himself, when he gets horny and bored and frustrated, that there was a time for Hannibal when Will was more than just minorly stabbed; he was dead. The experience seems to have had a lasting impact on his erratic lover. Will can’t say he minds so much, in the end, even if the drawbacks in the interim are annoying. It’s just one more thing that proves that Hannibal truly cares for him.

Will sighs again, twisting and tipping his head to entreat a kiss from the man beside him. Hannibal obliges, pressing their lips together once, again, with a sweet tenderness. “You haven’t,” he denies softly. “You’ve just been...cooking a lot. I miss you. Apparently I’m famous,” he informs him, changing the subject before his dick takes control and attempts to tell Hannibal just how *much* he misses him. “Wanna see?”

He turns back to his laptop, opening a web browser and navigating to Tattlecrime.com. He finds the article Abigail must have been referring to immediately. It’s not difficult; it’s the third listing on the front page and is entitled ‘WHO IS WILL GRAHAM?’. He can’t help his surprised frown, clicking on the article and suddenly altogether less excited to do so.

‘For the last month the killer known only as The Maestro has held Baltimore in his clutches of terror and unease. The haunting and macabre musical creations he contorts his victims into rival that of the Chesapeake Ripper. Good readers I am pleased to be able to assure you now that you needn’t worry about this twisted, fearsome killer any longer.

I would love to tell you that you may rest at ease because the local authorities, or even the FBI, who had been called in on the case, had worked with tireless enthusiasm to investigate the murder scenes, analyze the evidence and pinpoint and apprehend the serial killer known as the Maestro, namely one Tobias Budge, owner and proprietor of the local music store Chordophone String Shop. (To those unfortunate parents that had their children enrolled in music lessons with Mr. Budge, there is a victim support group that meets at the St. Agnes Catholic Church on 4th and Ash every Thursday evening at seven.)

It was not, however, the police or even the FBI that were able to bring down this unconscionable fiend, but one man: Will Graham.

Who is Will Graham, you ask? Dear readers I was wondering just the same. The only information I could obtain from my source is that Mr. Graham was recently added to the FBI payroll as a “consulting detective”. His ludicrous title in and of itself gives credence to his capabilities just as much as his training and experience does--which is to say none.

You read correctly. Will Graham is not a police officer or FBI agent or even a student enrolled at the Quantico FBI Training Academy. He appears to be, first and foremost, a civilian, and he also appears to have blown into town and into his questionable role at the FBI in the same breath.

“He’s just off, I don’t know,” my source explains uneasily. “He rolls into these crime scenes and walks around with his eyes closed. He mutters to himself and touches the corpses like they are something priceless and fragile and it’s just creepy. He creeps me out.”

Despite the apparent unease he causes it seems Mr. Graham is at least able to get the job done. Just yesterday he was able to connect the dots and track down the killer Tobias Budge. When he went to Chordophone String Shop for an interview, however, tragedy struck. Mr. Graham happened upon Budge in the midst of another murder and therein was forced into a struggle for his very life. He escaped, miraculously, having killed Budge in self-defense but only after suffering a stab wound himself.

Will Graham was admitted to John Hopkins Hospital and promptly rushed into surgery. At my last update he was in stable condition. My source was unable to determine how Mr. Graham became involved with the FBI to begin with. Agent Jack Crawford, Director of the Behavioral Sciences Unit at Quantico, was unavailable for a statement.’

“Christ,” Will breathes as he finishes the article. “What, does she get paid by the word or something?”

Beside him, Hannibal lets out a low hum. “Her grammar is abhorrent.”

A snort pulls from Will’s throat before he can stop it. “You’re just irritated she compared him to you,” he jibes, nudging his weight against his lover playfully. “This article was written yesterday. She’s quick. Her source is obviously someone in the BAU.”

“Brian Zeller.” Hannibal’s lips pull into a smirk when Will turns an eyebrow quirked in intrigue his way. “Miss Katz has far too much moral fiber to get in bed with what equates to a tabloid journalist. I have seen Miss Lounds lurking around crime scenes in the past--she’s not an unattractive woman, though Mr. Price is homosexual,” Hannibal concludes with utmost aplomb.

“You think Zeller is sleeping with Lounds?” Will questions; he’s more amused by that dynamic than he is offended by the article, at least. Lounds didn’t paint him in the greatest light, but neither did she damn him. Her source’s quotes weren’t exactly favorable, but then Will hardly gives a shit what the readers of Tattlecrime think of him. And she was quick to praise him for being more clever than the FBI, at least.

“I think he wishes to,” Hannibal corrects, reaching over to close the screen and pull the computer from Will’s lap. He brushes his lips against Will’s bare shoulder and Will shivers to feel Hannibal’s hot breath puffing against his neck. He tips his head, hoping to make his neck more inviting, and lets out a low groan when Hannibal’s hot, wet mouth closes over the pulse point there. “Tell me what you desire, darling,” Hannibal murmurs against his throat.

“You,” the word falls from his throat on a breathy gasp, “I miss touching you. So much. Please…”

Hannibal pulls back, shushing him with a reassuring whisper and a stroke to his cheek when Will lets out a squeak of disapproval at the action. When he shifts farther away and Will can

see that he's going for the lubricant stashed in the drawer on Hannibal's side of the bed, he is instantly placated.

His lover undresses and then returns, settling on his knees at Will's side. He must be just as anxious for this as Will is, for his cock is already flushed red and hard, hanging heavy between his spread legs. He leans forward, brushing kisses from Will's temple, down his cheek and jaw, eventually settling over his lips lightly. "If you tear your stitches I will be most displeased, darling."

Will's scoff shifts into a breathy groan as Hannibal's clever hands slip beneath the waistband of his boxers and slowly work them down his hips. He's already fully hard just from anticipating what is about to happen and his cock springs free when the barrier of fabric is removed, slapping up to rest heavy and leak all over his belly. "*I'm* the one meant to be cross with *you,* remember."

The noise Hannibal makes is a small, displeased sound, punctuated by a pouty kiss to Will's lower lip before he sets downward on a trail of wet kisses along the column of Will's neck. He gives a little lick over his Adam's Apple, pausing when his lips are pressed to the hollow at the base of Will's throat. "Have you not forgiven me yet, sweet boy?"

He snorts at that, pleased when it sounds as skeptically amused as he wants it to, struggling to swallow down a moan as Hannibal's fingers swirl lightly along his belly, careful to avoid Will's throbbing member. "I don't forget that easily, Hannibal." He brings a hand up to run through his lover's silken hair, makes a fist to tug his face away from the attention it's paying to Will's chest. "You were manipulative. And cruel. And you lied to me."

He sees guilt in Hannibal's amber eyes--that lovely, perfect guilt that he has grown a taste for over the last few days--but confusion as well. "I must admit guilt on the first two accusations," Hannibal begins, much to Will's pleasure, "As for the latter...remind me when I lied to you?"

"You lied when you were cruel," Will reminds him. Just the memory makes his throat feel thick, the words coming out with far less edge than Will intends. "When you implied that this was nothing more than an arrangement," despite himself, Will can't help but let the fist in his lover's hair unfurl, opting instead to run his fingers through the strands tenderly. When Hannibal's eyes soften as well, Will has to swallow around the lump in his throat before he can keep speaking. "I didn't realize before that all this was as new to you as it is to me. I didn't realize I wasn't the only one that kept everyone else out."

"Will--"

"That's done now. It's you and me--together," his fingers turn harsh once more, haul Hannibal forward to crush their lips together in a biting kiss. "I'm not going anywhere," he growls against Hannibal's kiss-bruised mouth, "So don't--"

Hannibal is done listening to him, apparently. He presses forward to steal Will's lips again, his tongue an insistent force licking into Will's mouth, taking his words, his breath. He can't help but moan when their tongues slide against each other, again when he feels Hannibal wrapping a hand around his cock--forgotten during their conversation but still very much

ready for action. “My wonderful, beautiful, darling boy,” Hannibal breathes into his mouth between kisses. “Let me offer recompense, hm?”

He can’t stop the whine that pulls from his throat when Hannibal pulls away, first his lips, then his hands. What he chooses to do instead of touching him, however, Will cannot form any complaints about. Hannibal picks up the lubricant that had been discarded to the bed next to them, snaps open the lid and slicks up his fingers. Will’s legs fall open automatically, a Pavlovian response, expectant and eager. But Hannibal makes no move to reach between his thighs to stroke against Will’s opening, slick him up, work him open.

He reaches between his own instead.

Will’s mouth goes dry instantly, his heartbeat quickening at the implication. “Fuck…” the word falls from his lips on a stuttered breath, his annoyance swept completely from his mind by the beautiful sight of Hannibal sinking down onto two of his own fingers. “*Hannibal*,” he moans with greedy anticipation. He reaches forward, sweeps away the hair that has fallen over his lover’s eyes. “Fuck, you’re gonna look so good riding my cock.”

Hannibal flashes him a rueful smile as he thrusts his fingers deep. “It has been a fantasy of mine for some time now,” he admits, and Will chokes.

“You--really?”

His tongue feels thick in his mouth as he watches Hannibal remove his fingers, crawl closer until he can swing one leg over Will’s hips. He leans forward to brush a teasing kiss to his mouth, slack with shock, his slick hand reaching between them to grasp Will’s cock to give a long, slow stroke. “I’ve never been opposed to bottoming, Will,” he holds Will in place, positioning himself over him and easing himself down. “But being buried inside you--” his voice hitches as Will’s cockhead breaches him and Will moans, his head falling back and his hands flying to Hannibal’s hips. It takes every ounce of his self control not to thrust up greedily. “--seeing you fall apart, writhing beneath me...it’s simply too tempting to resist.”

They groan in unison as Hannibal comes to rest flush against Will’s hips, Will’s fingers clenching hard in a silent plea for him to remain still. Hannibal feels so fucking good; silken heat and excruciating tightness and Will is far too sensitive after their coital hiatus. He’s in real danger of blowing his load immediately and this is far too precious an opportunity to end it after only a minute.

“Oh, *God.* Hannibal, *fuck--”*

His lover shushes him, drawing a hand through his hair to tilt his head up and leaning forward to place another sweet kiss against his panting mouth. His hands fall to Will’s shoulders, using him for stability as he rolls his hips against Will’s. “You just take care not to hurt yourself, darling boy, and let Daddy take care of the rest.”

That alone nearly does Will in, and then Hannibal is shifting again, rising up and sinking down in one smooth, controlled motion. Will’s head falls back again, his eyes squeezed shut because, as much as he would love to watch, Hannibal somehow looks even *better* riding

Will than he'd anticipated and it, also, is doing serious things to his self control. Hannibal does *serious* things to Will's self control.

He moves one hand from Hannibal's hip to grasp his solid cock, nearly undone once again at the moan that pulls from Hannibal's throat at the contact, again when he tilts his hips to allow the mass within him to press against his prostate. He strokes Hannibal as languidly as Hannibal rocks against him, neither of them in a rush to end this encounter. He can feel the hot tension building in his gut, thighs aching from Will holding himself rigid, in control; his side is on fire and Will can't help but idly think that Hannibal may have had a point with all his talk about tensing his abdominal muscles. He could not care less at this moment. Let it burn, let his stitches tear open, let every ounce of blood that flows through his veins seep out--as long as Hannibal continues what he is doing Will is sure he would be content. He focuses on his breathing; deep, slow things in and out and he thinks he's nearly got himself together--and then Hannibal speaks.

"You feel so wonderful, sweet boy," he tells him, his accent thick and voice breathy. Will moans. "Do you know what else felt wonderful?" he shifts atop him again, tilting his hips and leaning down so he can mouth kisses along Will's neck and shoulder, pulling another pitiful whimper from him. "Hearing Jack talk about how you *destroyed* Tobias Budge. Ten times, Will. You stabbed him ten times. Whatever were you thinking about? Please tell me."

"I was--nngh--I was thinking that you were mine," Will gasps when Hannibal clenches around him with that statement, his fist instinctively increasing its pace. "I was telling him--he wanted you for himself and I told him again and again--*mine.* Oh, fucking--*God--"*

The tightness around his cock increases to almost painful levels, spasming around him in time with the hot spurts of come that flood over Will's hand and belly. He can hold back no longer, jerking his hips up once--his only real movement in this entire dance--and releasing inside his lover with a pained cry. There is wetness on his torso that is not from Hannibal's release, the scent of copper in the air, and Will knows without even looking down that he's torn his stitches. Fuck, that probably means several more days without sex just for Hannibal to be sure that he's healed enough.

He's still pumping his hips in small, aborted thrusts into the tight heat above him, now even more slick with his come to ease the way. He's chasing that second shiver of pleasure that he can sometimes find before he becomes over-sensitized and the stimulation turns from pleasure to pain. When his lover leans down over his torso and licks a thick, hot stripe through the blood on his rib cage, Will comes again--nearly nothing, in terms of substance, but the neurons fire all the same and send that blissful chill through every nerve in his body.

Will groans when Hannibal pulls off him, sinking limp into the bed beneath him, exhausted, sore, sticky and sated. "Fuck, baby, that was…"

"Redemption worthy?" Hannibal prompts beside him, trailing one long finger through the streaks of red running down his side.

Will can't help but laugh, the sounded turning to a gruff cough as the burning in his fresh wound flares anew. "Getting there."

Hannibal hums, as though he's pleased by this proclamation, and then insists that Will stays put while he retrieves the supplies to redo his stitches. It is, unfortunately, as Will feared: Hannibal informs him (much to Will's dismay), as he reapplies sutures to the gash in his side, that it is highly unlikely Will will be up and about for at least two more days.

In the end, it is Jack Crawford who gets Will out of bed (and Will may be forever grateful for that fact). He calls upon them quite unexpectedly the next day, demanding to speak to Will. Hannibal can hardly lead Jack up to where Will is holed up in the master suite--not without raising suspicion as to the true nature of their relationship--so he has Jack wait in the dining room as he fetches Will and assists him down the stairs.

"Just what the Hell were you playing at, Graham?" Jack barks at him the moment he steps into the room.

Will cannot control the eyebrow that pulls upward at the accusation. "I put it all in my report, Jack. I sent it out on Wednesday," he reminds the agent, hobbling stiffly to one of the chairs and sinking down into it gingerly.

"Report," the bulky man huffs, "You aren't an official agent, Will. You don't know what information we need in your *reports."*

"Can I get anyone some coffee?" Hannibal, gracious host, inserts himself in an attempt to break the growing tension.

"No," Crawford bites out, thinks to add, "Thank you," in an acceptable amount of time.

"Just water, please," Will requests, turns back to Jack. "Was there information I left out that you needed?" he questions.

Jack bristles at the inquiry, as though he believes it was asked mockingly. "Let's get this straight right now: You are not an official FBI agent, full fucking stop. If you have a lead on a case you do *not* conduct interviews alone, or at *all* without prior consent from the Bureau. *Am I clear on that?"*

"I had no way of knowing, Jack," Will attempts to soothe, nodding at Hannibal as he places a tall glass of water on the table before him. "He was one name on a list of six. If he hadn't left the upstairs unattended, left the basement door open, I might never have known something was amiss."

"And you ventured down into that basement without even thinking to call it in," Jack argues. His jaw is set tightly, his nostrils flared in irritation; Will can see it's going to take more to placate the agent.

"Yes, I should have called. Curiosity got the best of me and by the time I saw the man bleeding out on the floor Budge already knew I was there. He grabbed me through the stairwell and took me down. I had no exit strategy after that."

He can feel Hannibal standing behind his chair like a silent guardian; warm, protective. All at once he wishes he could lean back into that warmth, accept it for what it is without fearing Jack as a witness to it.

The dark man sighs, rubs his eyes as if they have been at this conversation for *hours* and he's just *sick* from it. "Look, perhaps I didn't do the best job in instructing you on protocol. To be honest, I didn't anticipate how well you'd take to field work. But I can't have you out there if I can't trust you not to go rogue--or to keep suspects alive."

Will grits his teeth against the scathing comment that itches to burst passed them. *I suppose I'll just die next time.*

"I've asked Dr. Lecter to perform a psych eval before you continue. He's going to keep you grounded in the field. And for God's sake, get your damn application submitted. Then you're at least enrolled in the Academy. Freddie Lounds had a field day with the FBI letting a civilian run loose carte blanche."

At the mention of the article, Will considers bringing up the apparent informant in the BAU. But Jack looks irritated enough, and he really isn't gunning for a fight, so he allows the subject to remain unspoken. "You must anticipate positive results," Will comments. At Jack's hard stare, Will glances pointedly to the table between them where a case file sits.

"Officially, you are off duty until cleared by a psychiatrist."

Will quirks an eyebrow at the phrasing. "Unofficially?"

Jack sighs, sliding the file across the table toward Will and somehow looking both eager and reluctant to do so. "Unofficially: we don't have time for paperwork and procedure. Six missing girls in Minnesota in the last six months; no bodies, nothing that comes from bodies."

Will flips the file open and spreads out the photos of the missing girls. Something sick turns over in his stomach as he eyes them all laid out next to each other. They all have the same skin tone, look about the same age. They all have long, chestnut brown hair and big blue eyes. They are all pretty, in a plain, Midwestern sort of way.

And they all look like Abigail Hobbs.

When Jack leaves, Will sets up shop at the dining room table, spreading out the contents of the case file--what little there is of it, at least. Because no bodies--or anything else--have turned up, there are no lab reports, no crime scene photos. There are only six photos of six girls, with six paltry statements from each of the victims' parents.

Hannibal makes him put everything away when dinner is ready--not soup, to Will's profound relief--but as soon as the dessert dishes are cleared from the table he's back at it, frowning over the same six, short statements. It looks as though each girl was taken on a Friday, none

actually reported missing until Monday. They were each taken from six separate college campuses in Minnesota as well.

All the while, he can't shake Abigail from the back of his thoughts, reminded incessantly that he never did call her back the day previous.

Hannibal insists on Will retiring when the hour grows late, pointing out that he needs his rest and the file will still be there in the morning. They switch sides when they go to bed that night, making it possible for Will to lay on his good side so Hannibal can lay behind him, curved against his back with his arms forming a shelter around Will that he is more than happy to tuck in to.

He hums when Hannibal nuzzles a trail of soft kisses into the curls behind his ear, down his neck, pulled back to awareness from his distraction. "What's bothering you, Will?"

"Those girls," he murmurs, too worn out to even attempt at feigning quietude. "I don't know, they just--they look an awful lot like Abigail. *Exactly* like Abigail, actually."

"The tour will be moving south for the fall and winter months," Hannibal points out, one hand trailing across Will's stomach to stroke lightly along his hip. "Nowhere near Minnesota. She's safe."

"Her safety isn't exactly what I'm thinking about--not entirely at least. She's *from* Minnesota, you know. Having some trouble with her father when she took off to join the company."

Behind him, Hannibal shifts ever so slightly, and Will can tell he's caught his interest. "You think there's a possibility that Abigail's father is responsible for the missing girls in Minnesota," he states, and Will hums his agreement. "It would be quite the coincidence," he points out.

"Stranger things have happened," Will sighs. He shakes his head, bringing his hands up to rub at his face tiredly. "I can't think about it anymore tonight. Distract me."

His lover presses a kiss to the nape of his neck. "There'll be no more sex until your wound is fully healed," he reminds him, his voice stern and gentle and, Will thinks, just the tiniest bit regretful.

He can't stop his grin. "Talk to me. Tell me a story. In Italian--or Lithuanian. That always relaxes me, even if I don't know what you're saying."

Hannibal does, his tone low and melodic, flowing with beautiful and incomprehensible words. He lets his eyes slip closed with a sigh, lets the tension melt from his frame so he can mold just a bit closer to the solid warmth behind him. Within minutes, he's asleep.

Chapter End Notes

First off, it was my first time writing a Freddie Lounds article and I had a ridiculously fun time doing it. Secondly, I have this headcannon where Freddie gets so into the junk she spits out that she has less than stellar grammar in her articles. I actually had to go back and read through her article twice to delete commas and end sentences with prepositions intentionally to dumb down her article a little bit.

I'm on Tumblr, so there's that.

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

An unexpected guest arrives with an even more unexpected story.

Chapter Notes

I tried hard to push through this chapter but work has been slaying me so hard it's been a struggle to open my tablet to write every night. As such this isn't quite as long a chapter as I would like it to be, but it's an update and I do believe it's quality more than filler, at least. Thank you for your patience!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The killer in Minnesota (who may or may not be Abigail's father) had taken his sixth victim three weeks prior to Jack handing over the case file to Will. For a week and a half, Will turns into a pacing, anxious mess that manages to annoy even Hannibal, whose seemingly eternal patience runs out at about day eight.

"Just call her, Will," he implores when Will plucks his phone up from the counter and then sets it down again a moment later; the doctor is very clearly working to restrain the irritated sigh that longs to slip free.

"Any suggestions as to how I'm intended to start that conversation?" he snaps back; his own patience for this uneasy, restless maelstrom of emotion he's been feeling had run out a full three days before Hannibal's. "'Hey Abigail, I know you basically ran away from home because of your dad and it's kind of a touchy subject, but do you have any reason to think that he might be the one abducting all those girls that look like you in Minnesota? Also, if you know where he might be keeping them or dumping the bodies that would be really helpful too.' Brilliant."

Hannibal's only response is the slight pursing of his lips, the *snick* of his knife meeting the cutting board as he minces garlic sounding just a little bit sharper. Will watches him for a moment, further annoyed with himself that he's managed to displease his lover. He sighs, meandering around to the other side of the island. He slides his arms around Hannibal's middle slowly, careful not to disturb the smooth motion of his knifework, presses chest to back and nuzzles into the space between his lover's sharp shoulder blades.

"He's probably already taken her," he sighs, feels Hannibal tense ever so slightly beneath him.

“If his pattern holds,” Hannibal nods, the rhythmic movement of his body halting as his finishes with the garlic, “It stands to reason that that very well may be the case.”

“Jack’s been calling every day. I have nothing to tell him. I’m ignoring the only lead I might have because I’m too scared to pick up the phone.”

“On the contrary, I’ve seen you pick up the phone several times--it’s dialing that seems to be the trouble.” Hannibal sets his knife down on the cutting board and turns in his arms, slides his own forward to rest lightly on Will’s hips.

Will drops his head to rest against the broad chest before him. “I’m sorry,” he murmurs into the soft silk of Hannibal’s shirt (a rich cranberry color, today). He feels more than hears Hannibal’s soft sigh as his hold tightens around him. He’s just raised his head to seek out a kiss when his phone begins to buzz against the counter across from them. Will groans, pulling away reluctantly. “That will be Jack,” he sighs as he reaches for the vibrating rectangle. “Looking for an update or calling to--”

He freezes when he sees the name lighting up his screen. It feels kismet, a twist of fate telling him to, for the love of all that is holy, stop putting off this damn conversation.

“Abigail,” he greets, his heart in his throat and his stomach plummeting down through his bowels.

“Will, I--”

“I’m glad you called,” he pushes forward, knows that if he doesn’t he’ll never get the words out. “I need to talk to you...about your dad.”

“Will--” she sounds unsure, harried. Perhaps she’d been expecting this conversation, knowing what work Will has been doing for the FBI.

“I know it’s not a pleasant subject, and I seriously don’t know how I’m even meant to ask this, but bear with me, please. I need to know--”

“I’m in Baltimore,” the exasperated voice blurts out.

Will freezes completely for the second time in minutes, garnering Hannibal’s attention back from the onion he’s started with on his cutting board. “You’re--How--*Why--”*

“I’m really sorry to intrude--I didn’t know what else to do. It’s okay if--”

“Where are you?” he demands, striding over to the key hooks by the garage door, “I’m--*dammit,* where are my keys?” he turns to Hannibal, feeling frantic and lost.

“The Volvo is in for maintenance tonight, darling. Your oil change was overdue. Take the Bentley.”

Even with his mind racing, Will can hear the way the word ‘Volvo’ drops off of Hannibal’s tongue as though it’s something distasteful. He ignores it for the time being--there’s still lingering annoyance from the conversation (read, heated debate) they’d had when Hannibal

had suggested simply purchasing a new car when the subject of the Volvo's oil change had arisen in the first place.

"I don't need a ride," Abigail is insisting when Will turns his attention back to the phone at his ear. "Just text me your address. I'll explain when I get there."

Will agrees, ending the call and sending the text before he realizes that he may be overstepping. He glances over to Hannibal, unsure.

"This is your home too, mylimasis," Hannibal reminds him, far too skilled at reading his face (and his mind). "If something is wrong I'm more than happy to lend assistance in whatever way I can."

In his chest, his heart races and melts all at once. He saunters back over to Hannibal, abandoning his phone to the countertop so that he can reach with both hands into his lover's silken locks and pull him into a fierce kiss. Hannibal's hands snag his hips without delay, hauling Will even closer until they are pressed entirely against one another, mouth to groin; licking, sucking, biting mouths to groins that are quickly becoming much more active as well. Arousal settles heavy in his gut, unspools with promising heat as their bodies brush together. Will pulls back with a dejected sigh. They need to regain control of themselves post-haste; it wouldn't do for Abigail to arrive to find him bent over the counter being drilled by Hannibal.

Will can feel himself flush at the thought, another strong surge of arousal bursting through him. He places a hand on his lover's chest to keep him at bay when he makes to move forward again, huffing a breathless laugh before darting forward to grant him one chaste kiss. "Any chance you could stretch this to dinner for three?" he nods down at Hannibal's forgotten cutting board.

His answer is one haughty eyebrow twitching upwards, as though Hannibal is surprised he thought he needed to ask. "Undoubtedly."

Will doesn't even realize it's been raining until he opens the door to a damp and harrowed looking Abigail, curled into the respite of the eaves over their front door from the onslaught of the chilling autumn rain. He notes a taxi pulling away from the curb as he ushers her in and immediately begins a mental line of interrogation. Did her car finally break down on her? More completely than her funds would allow her to fix? How did she get to the city? Why didn't she tell him she was having trouble?

The last thought jogs the memory of their last few conversations, one shortly after he had been stabbed and the next previous when he had been utterly distressed over his schism with Hannibal. Did she feel as though she'd only be compounding on his problems if she shared with him her own?

He's got her wrapped in a hug, laden with both guilt and relief, before he even realizes he's doing it, and she immediately attempts to squirm away, protesting about getting him all wet in turn. He only holds her tighter until the tension drops from her slim frame and she hugs

him in return. He takes hold of her shoulders when he draws away, holding her at arms length to give her a once over.

This is not the carefree Abigail he left with the company a few months prior. She looks time-worn and exhausted, stressed and jittery. Her dark brows are pulled together over her eyes in a way that looks so natural Will has to wonder when the last time was that they were smoothed out with contentment. Her mouth is pulled into a tight, semi-frown, even as she attempts to smile at his warm greeting. There is a sodden blue and yellow duffel bag slung over one shoulder.

“C’mon,” he beckons. He turns to head upstairs, expecting her to follow; she does, silently. Will holds onto his questions for the moment; there will be time for that, and probably sooner than Abigail would care for. She can at least be dry and comfortable before he begins demanding his answers. He leads her down the hall to the room across from his own (his closet). “This is the guest room. There’s an en suite through there,” he motions to the closed door that is not the closet, “There’s towels, if you want to dry your hair a bit--I’m afraid we don’t have any hair dryers--but make yourself comfortable, get into some dry clothes. Then you can come on down and find us in the kitchen. Hannibal is making dinner. He’s an excellent cook,” he can’t stop the smile that quirks his lips when he thinks about the man’s incredible culinary talent, fondness expanding painfully in his chest. “You don’t have any food allergies, right?”

“No,” she confirms. She shuffles her weight from foot to foot, glancing around the room with an expression of mixed intimidation and embarrassment. “Will you don’t--I don’t need a room. I mean, you don’t have to--”

“Do you have somewhere else to go?” he questions before she can fully deny the kindness. “Somewhere that’s not a homeless shelter?” When she can only blink at him in response he nods. “Thought as much. You’re staying here. It’s no trouble, really.”

“But you--” she pauses and takes a breath, eyes darting down the hall to the stairwell. She lowers her voice when she speaks again. “I know things haven’t been the smoothest around here and I don’t want to add to--”

Will’s smile spreads at her concern. Sweet girl. “Everything is fine, Abigail. We’re fine. All of that is passed us now. Truly, don’t worry about it. Just settle in, and then come down for dinner.”

When the line of tension in her shoulders breaks once more and she acquiesces with a nod and a sigh, Will leaves her to it. Hannibal is just pulling the artichokes from the oven when he returns to the kitchen.

“Would you be so kind as to retrieve a bottle from the cellar, darling?” he’s asked with nary a glance to his person. Will is just about to point out that he hasn’t even a remote guess as to what he should be retrieving, but Hannibal continues on, obviously having already mentally selected the exact bottle he deems appropriate for their dinner. “There is a bottle of Alsace Pinot Gris--the 1998 vintage, if you will. I believe would be located in the second row to the left, about midway down the line.”

He *believes*-- Will withholds the snort that tries to burst forth--as if he is not mentally picturing the precise slot in which said vintage is currently residing. But Will goes in search of the bottle because Hannibal is being absolutely amazing in regards to this whole situation and he figures it's the least he can do. Hannibal instructs him to pour it into the decanter when he returns, lamenting in a grumble that he should have had the foresight to do so twenty minutes prior. Will is reminding him that neither Abigail's nor his own palate are refined enough to even tell the difference between a wine that has been properly aerated and one that hasn't when their guest takes a hesitant step into the kitchen.

"Hey, kid," he beams at her. All things aside, it is just truly *good* to see her familiar face again. "Just finishing up here. Let's go settle in at the table," he shoos her through to the dining room, grabbing the decanter as he goes and, ignoring Hannibal's trailing plea to wait another ten minutes before serving, pours them each a glass as they take their seats. "How's Gemma?" he asks, hoping that initially lobbing her a simple question will help put Abigail at ease.

He's pleased to see the fond smile that spreads across her lips at the mention. Not all the things then, at least, have gone wrong. "She's Gemma. Not thrilled to see me go but promised she take me back on when...if I return."

The lightness in her tone sinks to something thick and heavy at the end of her statement, as though she's just reminded herself of her situation. Will wishes she would clue him in, as well. "You remember Hannibal," he says instead, nodding to the man as he sweeps into the room with three plates balanced across his arms.

"Yes. It's nice to meet you properly--you have a lovely home," she adds, suddenly the picture of demure propriety. Will can't stop the fond smirk at twists his lips.

"A pleasure to see you again. You are a more than welcome guest," Hannibal assures her, "Please make yourself at home."

Abigail flushes at the invitation and Will wonders if she's as taken with the man's accent as he is--Hannibal could recite the dullest metaphysical theorem, the most mundane theological philosophy, and his voice would *still* sound like sex.

Before she can apologize for her intrusion (as Will knows she will), Hannibal is announcing their meal as he sets their plate before them. "Veal piccata with roasted artichoke hearts. I see Will has already deemed fit to serve the accompanying Pinot Gris."

He shoots Will a scolding glance, which Will meets head on with a tipped eyebrow over his glass as he takes a sip of the wine. Hannibal's eyes flash, smoldering and then not, and all at once Will knows that he will be repaid in full for his insolence in private later on. Immediately his mind begins spinning fantasies and scenarios--will Hannibal take him with his mouth tortuously slowly or use his own mouth relentlessly to completion? Perhaps there will be a repeat of the instance where Hannibal bound him helpless and assaulted his ass with lips and tongue until Will was sobbing for relief--

His cheeks heat at that train of thought and Will attempts to beat back the speculations as well as the blush, but he can see by the twitch of a smirk on Hannibal's lips as he takes his

seat that he hasn't fooled the man in the least. "It never has to sit for as long as he insists," he tells Abigail, taking another sip as proof of the wine's readiness. "It tastes the same either way."

From the corner of his eye he can see Hannibal bristle at the declaration, opening his mouth to no doubt educate them on the history of the grape and the age-old process of fermentation and the undeniable necessity of breathing vintages properly. Will heads him off before he can get started, attention back on the girl across the table who has been glancing between them with growing amusement. Her hair is still slightly damp, tucked behind her ears and clinging to skin where it falls against her neck, but she has changed into a dry pair of jeans and t-shirt.

"Tell me a story, Abigail," Will prompts her, and her blue eyes widen slightly in alarm at finally having been called out.

The fork en route to her mouth pauses momentarily and then resumes its course, presumably so she can stretch her response time by chewing the bite thoughtfully--and slowly. When she finishes the bite, she takes a sip of wine. "I don't...really know where to begin," she admits, immediately turns her attention to Hannibal, "This is really delicious."

Hannibal grants her a smile, preening at the praise. Before he can open his mouth to peacock any further, Will seizes control of the conversation. "Abigail." She heaves a sigh, setting down her fork and turning her eyes back to Will. "Why don't you start with what happened to your car?"

"It was under my name, so my parents couldn't report it stolen in an attempt to track me down. They...hired a private investigator." Her eyes dart down to her plate, "I offered to pay him off to keep quiet...gave him the bulk of what was left of what you--" she freezes, eyes darting to Hannibal.

"He knows."

"--gave me," she continues. She takes a steadying breath, though Will can still feel the unease pouring off of her in waves. "I didn't know what else to do. I thought it might be okay, then but...I don't know, I just had a bad feeling."

"You think he double-crossed you," Hannibal guesses softly. "Accepted your money and disclosed your location to your parents for a second paycheck."

Abigail picks up her fork and prods at the artichoke before her. "The guy seemed sleazy as f--" her eyes dart to Hannibal and she clears her throat. "I didn't get the feeling that he was exactly above board, even for a PI. I panicked. I couldn't stay with the company, and I was nearly broke. I was at the Greyhound station before I even realized that I didn't know where to go...so I came here. I'm sorry."

"Don't apologize." Their voices ring out in unison and Will can't hold back the fond smile that twists his lips when he and Hannibal lock gazes a moment later; in fact, doesn't want to. "I'm glad you came," Will continues on his own. He considers telling Abigail that he doesn't care about the money she gave away nor the perceived intrusion, he only wants her safe. He considers bringing up the long-avoided subject of her father and the possible implications of

him discovering her location. When he opens his mouth he is half-sure he is going to tell her how nice it is to see her, that he missed her even though his lacking correspondence may not have indicated as such.

“Finish your dinner,” he instructs softly.

Hannibal insists on tending to the dishes on his own, shooing Will and Abigail away to the study where Will promptly adjourns to the sideboard to pour them each a generous three fingers of whiskey.

Hannibal had lit the fireplace before dinner and Abigail perches on the edge of one of the overstuffed armchairs before it now. Any pleasure she’d derived from their meal, likely the best she’s eaten in quite some time, any relaxation that may have been allowed to creep over the edges of her walls has been shut out now. Her face is tight, her mouth a thin, hard line when it’s not parting to allow in a sip of liquor. The fire before her flickers, casts shadows that sharpen the sternness of her features. Her sky blue eyes have never appeared so dark.

“You know what I want to talk about,” Will guesses softly. Only it’s not a guess; he knows, just by looking at her he knows, and the last bit of confirmation comes to him as her shoulders go rigid, her round jaw tenses.

There is silence for a moment, save for the occasional crackle from the fireplace, while another slip of amber liquid disappears between her lips. “He’s taking those girls. The missing ones in Minnesota. Girls that look just like me.”

Slowly, just a fraction of an inch at a time, those heavy blue eyes trail away from the flames to Will’s knee, to his torso, shoulder, chin.

“Do you fear that or know it?” Will presses gently. Her gaze is watery when it finally meets his own, tears threatening to brim over at any moment. “Tell me, Abigail,” he urges softly.

There’s something there, Will can see, just beneath the surface. It longs to break forth even more intensely than the tears in her eyes. He can see the shackles that it strains against; fear of admitting the truth out loud, allowing it to be more real than it already is. Fear of retribution,rejection, abandonment.

“When I toured my first college campus he insisted on coming with me. I thought it was just another way for him to try to control me...I thought maybe if he didn’t like the college he would try to talk me out of attending, even though it was the closest one to home. It didn’t seem so odd, really; a lot of parents go on the tours with their kids.”

She pauses, downing the last half of her tumbler; Will doesn’t think it’s solely the burn of the alcohol that has her swallowing so harshly.

“But then he saw her,” she continues, her voice wavering, thick. “A girl that looked like me. *Just* like me. And something shifted. I could feel it, like it was shifting in me too. He told me

to go talk to her, find out a bit about her, make a friend quickly so I wouldn't be alone at that college, if I decided to enroll."

Silence stretches between them. Abigail's gaze has fallen to her lap, her fingers clench white-knuckled around her empty glass.

"That girl went missing not long after that, didn't she? Did you see it on the news? Social media?"

Her jerky nod finally allows the tears to slide down her cheeks in fat drops. "I left the next week. I knew what it meant. Whether it took one girl or ten...eventually it would be me." It seems to take all of her strength to raise her eyes once again, and when she meets Will's even more tears spill forth, cascade down her pale, freckled face. "It's selfish," her voice breaks on the word and a tight sob slips out before she continues. "It should be me. I shouldn't let those other girls take my place. I shouldn't--be alive--"

His fingers pull the glass from her hand, deposit it on the table between their chairs, and then he's leaning forward in his seat, wrapping his arms around her frail, trembling form and murmuring gentle shushes into her chestnut hair as she breaks and sobs against him. He allows her emotions to pour forth, purging the guilt and pain in the simplest way the human body knows how. He holds her and pets her hair until she grows quiet and still with emotional and physical exhaustion. Only then does he speak to her.

"You are not the reason for their deaths. Your life is not any less valuable than theirs. You don't have to be afraid anymore. You're here now. And Hannibal and I...we're going to protect you." It's more than a consolation, more than a promise even. It's a vow; one of the most solemn that Will has ever spoken in his twenty-nine years. His eyes drift up to the doorway of the study where his lover stands, observing them. For a moment--just a fraction of a second--Will thinks he sees an entirely new emotion in the man's muddy amber eyes. By the time their gazes lock it's gone, whatever it was, and Hannibal gives a short nod of confirmation.

His chest expands in the way that it so often does when Hannibal overwhelms him in every way possible. This impossible man that has opened his home--*himself* --to Will, who was nothing more than a stranger to him mere months ago. And now he's adjusting his life once more for Abigail, who is hardly more than a stranger even to Will.

There's a word, he knows, for the incomprehensible warmth in his chest, the lightness in his soul that he feels when he considers the man across from him. When eyes lock, fingertips brush, lips press. When breath and blood and heartbeat are shared. There's a word, but Will won't let himself think it, let alone say it. Like Abigail's guilt, so long locked inside in silence, he worries what may burst forth if he gives it a voice.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to everyone who had followed me or liked/reblogged my posts on Tumblr, btw. (And for all the love on AO3, obviously!). You guys are seriously the best. <3

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Hannibal requests that Will take Abigail shopping, so one could argue that this whole thing is his fault.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He can't stop the low groan that pulls from his throat as Will sinks down onto him--truthfully, he doesn't want to; he's been anticipating that tight, velvet heat from the moment Will climbed into bed and swung one thick thigh over his hips to frame Hannibal's. Wet lips cover his mouth, swallow up the sound, hissing out a shaken hush on his own trembling breath as he comes to settle fully into Hannibal's lap.

"Quietly," Will urges in a whisper against his lips. "No need to traumatize the poor girl any further."

When Abigail had seemed to shed the last tear her body could produce and her wracking sobs had subsided, Will had guided her to the guest room, murmuring gentle assurances all the way that everything would be okay, that he would be just down the hall if she needed anything.

He had entered the bedroom wearing a grim frown, solemnity heavy in his posture. After he had disappeared to the en suite to shower and ready for bed, however, he had emerged an entirely different man; refreshed, renewed, stalking toward the bed with confidence and purpose and entirely nude until he was crawling atop Hannibal and straddling his hips. The book that had been clutched in Hannibal's grasp was relocated hurriedly as Will's lips crashed against his own.

They had begun heatedly; lips and teeth biting and sucking, hands clawing away the clothes that separated their flesh, but then Will had shifted once more. His urgent, grasping hands instead glided along him in gentle caresses, his lips turned soft against his neck and jaw, tongue requesting access to his mouth with a demure swipe. And then he had leaned over to claim the lubricant from the nightstand, his hand working a smooth, steady rhythm along Hannibal's cock while completely neglecting his own preparation. When he sank down onto Hannibal it was also with a deliberate slowness, head tilted back and eyes squeezed shut, his mouth falling open with his near silent panting.

He rides Hannibal slowly, lifting himself up to sink down once again at an excruciatingly leisurely pace, their foreheads resting together and their stilted breath mingling between them. "Thank you," Will murmurs against his lips with a sigh as their hips join once more.

Hannibal doesn't need to ask as to why he is being thanked, does so regardless as a devious plot unfolds swiftly in his mind; he can see his goal in reach…

"You don't have to do this for her, or me for that matter--opening your home, your life," he lets out a soft whimper when Hannibal tilts his hips and pushes up into him.

"You don't get something for nothing, dear boy," he informs the supple thing atop him, hands moving to his hips to encourage a slightly faster pace. "If you think this kindness will not cost you, you are gravely mistaken." He drawls the words as a means to an end, another form of manipulation, perhaps, but certainly one that Will couldn't object over too fervently. The statement is a complete farce, of course, but it wouldn't do for Will to know that for him Hannibal would do anything, everything--

To Hannibal's surprise (and delight), Will lets out a low, sultry chuckle at the declaration, increasing the undulating rocking of his hips and brushing his mouth along Hannibal's jaw. "Take your fill."

His lips curl as he mouths along the smooth column of his lover's throat, his teeth scraping teasingly along a collarbone before he sucks a livid mark onto his pale chest. His own chuckle rumbles between them as his lips and tongue travel down, tease at one pert nipple. "You may consider this a down-payment, I suppose," he tells Will. He reaches one hand up into the young man's curls, still damp from his recent shower and now even more so with sweat, as he works his body against him. He tugs Will's head down, setting his mouth to one delicious earlobe to nibble gently. "A car, I think, would settle the score."

He tilts his hips again, pushes up into Will with purpose as his other hand wraps around his lover's leaking, neglected cock. The sound that pulls from Will's throat is both a gasp and a moan, halfheartedly stifled, his head dropping back as much as the hand in his hair will allow. *"Daddy,"* he whimpers, unheeding now of the noise he makes as they both quicken their pace, chase their release. "Oh, fuck, baby, I'm--*yes--"*

He works Will's swollen cock with a quick efficiency, the hand tangled in his hair falling to Will's hip to ensure he's angled perfectly--

And then Will comes with a strangled moan, his fingers digging into Hannibal's broad shoulders as he clutches frantically for something to ground him through the pleasure pulsing within him. His release stripes hot across Hannibal's stomach and chest, the scent and sound of Will's pleasure, the exquisitely tight clench around his cock pushing Hannibal over the edge as well.

His lover collapses over him, resting heavily against his sweat and come-slicked chest as they both struggle to bring their breathing back in line. He buries his face into the crook of Hannibal's neck, mouthing panting kisses into his skin, swiping his tongue out to taste salty flesh. "You really gonna make me get a new car?" he wheezes.

Hannibal raises a hand to pet through Will's hair, pushing back the damp curls that cling to his forehead. He considers telling him no; that if he truly doesn't want to they needn't proceed with a purchase. Then he thinks about the rusty Volvo sitting in their garage, their

driveway, leaking oil and all other manner of fluids that should remain *within* a vehicle. "Darling boy...Of course I am."

Despite Will's best efforts to persuade him otherwise, Hannibal must attend to his patients the following day. He drops Will and Abigail off at the front entrance of the Volvo dealership so they can pick up his car. Will spots the sign indicating the service area where they can retrieve the car, but before he can track in that direction Will's attention is pulled to row after row of sleek and shiny vehicles on display for sale. His head tilts to the side as he considers the cars, his steps pulling along in a direction that is opposite the one he needs to go. Abigail trails behind him curiously.

"Thinking of an upgrade?" she inquires after they've meandered passed several of the new cars.

"Hannibal's making me," he mutters as he studies the info sheet posted in the window of a particularly basic looking Volvo.

Abigail's scandalized snort pulls his attention away from the Very Sensible Car and back to the girl who is leveling him with a stare that is both amused and annoyed. "And you're looking at *Volvos*?!"

"Well I'm not getting a goddamned matching *Bentley*," he snaps back.

"For Christ's sake, Will, you have to get something sexier than a *Volvo* though! That man is gonna dump your ass when too much of your poor taste shines through. Why don't you just let him pick something out *for* you?"

Will frowns, turning away from her to continue obstinately down the line. In truth, nothing is really catching his eye, but he'll be damned if he admits that *now.* "Because he'll stick me in a goddamned matching Bentley," he grumbles back. He pretends to browse for a few more minutes, though he realizes that Abigail has a point--if he's going to get a new car he should at least attempt to find something that he could get excited over. As it was, he had had the Volvo for so long because it was cheap and reliable, which was exactly what someone in his line of work and social standing needed. But that wasn't the case any longer.

He ignores Abigail's smirk when he mutters something about the wind getting too cold as he changes direction to head back to the service area to pick up his waiting car.

As unappealing as the prospect of shopping for a new car is to Will, accompanying an eighteen year old girl to the mall is somehow even less so. Unfortunately for him, Hannibal had slipped him a thick roll of cash before they had left the house, instructing Will to take their new charge to outfit herself with some fresh clothing. Despite his reservations of a crowded mall and an apparel-mad teenager, Will could not deny the fact that Hannibal's considerate gesture left a near-constant buzz brewing in his belly; disregarding the instruction seemed to be a completely hopeless musing.

She was hesitant at first, attempting to graciously decline the offer several times, until Will's patience left him and he brusquely pointed out that if he was expected to get a whole damned car, *she* could put up with picking out a few clothes.

Abigail's hesitation was, as many emotions are for a teenage girl, fleeting; dispelled quickly and completely as soon as they stepped into the first clothing store and she was drawn to a very chic looking fall jacket on a mannequin. When she asked Will if it was too late in the season to purchase such a light jacket he scoffed and shrugged. He had, after all, owned all of *one* jacket for the last four years.

"Get that one and a winter parka," he suggests dismissively, already eyeing the exit of the store with longing. "Hannibal will be thrilled."

Leading the lifestyle he had (and never particularly interested in dating besides), Will had not really had any exposure to the perils of being stuck in a clothing store while his significant other meticulously sifted through racks of various garments and tried on far more than they intended to purchase. He never understood the appeal, to be quite frank; Will is the kind of guy that buys shirts in a pack of three from Walmart. Even with Hannibal, who is somehow more concerned with appearance than Will ever thought possible for one human being, he is not subjected to the torture of clothes shopping. Everything of Hannibal's is custom from a tailor and everything that he buys for Will is an inexplicably perfect fit and seemingly magically appears in his closet at Hannibal's whim.

Now Will can commiserate with the other sad bastards whose girlfriends have hauled them along for a day at the mall. He sits silently in a well-worn leather chair at the entrance to the fitting rooms, pointedly ignoring the other men that wait nearby and fervently hoping he's not going to slip into some sort of horrific 'new look' montage from a cheesy chick flick. He slouches down in his chair, scrolling through listings of nearby dealerships and attempting to ignore the desolate boredom of victims of old that seems to pulse out of the leather and seep into his being.

There are a multitude of dealerships in greater Baltimore; he certainly won't be limited by way of make--not that Hannibal would let something as jejune as convenience or distance dictate what type of car he would buy. He sighs and thumbs back to the home screen, utterly overwhelmed by the possibilities. He has never before made a purchase based on the sole factor of *desire*-- there were *always* other things to consider: cost, reliability, durability--Will had never even purchased a pair of shoes before without weighing the benefits of function over fashion. It was one of the biggest disparities between him and Hannibal and one of the reasons he had been so uncertain about how comfortable he would be stepping into their 'arrangement'.

The word makes him scoff, so wholly inappropriate to describe what has forged quickly and strongly between he and Hannibal, while still retaining the sting of being so recently rebuffed by his lover. He pulls open the message thread for the man in question, lips quirking into a smirk as he punches out a message.

You're mad if you think I'm getting some brand new $50,000 car.

To Will's surprise (and delight), he receives a response only minutes later; Hannibal must be between patients.

I will settle for a vehicle produced in the last five years with less than 50,000 miles on it.

A moment later:

Insolent boy.

Will swallows thickly upon reading the second message, a thrill pulsing directly to his cock at the words.

You like me that way. He accuses flirtatiously.

And even if you don't there's no recourse for you tonight...sending me clothes shopping with a teenage girl is punishment enough, I think.

As if the shopping gods themselves had heard Will's plea and decided to take pity on him, Abigail finally emerges from the dressing rooms, the articles she had disappeared with now separated in groups between each hand. She deposits the hangers from her left hand onto a return rack and then turns to Will with a smile so bright the interminable boredom that had been crushing him for the last thirty minutes vanishes instantaneously.

They leave the store, Abigail's bright red shopping bag swinging jovially between them, and then he realizes that this is a process that will be repeated at least once or twice more. Before he can reconcile what that means for his afternoon, he is distracted by a voice speaking his name. He turns instinctively, his eyes first drawn to the mane of red curls that frame the woman's head and then dropping to the recording device she's clutching casually in her hand.

"Freddie Lounds," he greets back coolly, his tone a mixture of surprise and contempt. He doesn't want to dislike her--she does put out entertaining work--but she did put him in a spot of hot water with Jack the last time she took an interest in him. He turns back to Abigail, who has paused in her trek ahead of him and watches the meeting with interest. His gaze flicks to the ice cream shop over her shoulder and without thinking about it he's digging out the thick fold of bills from his pocket and passing a few over to her. "Why don't you go get us a couple of cones?" he suggests; she's smart enough to take the hint and gracious enough to follow along without argument.

"Flavor preference?"

"Surprise me," he urges. "No wrong answers," he gives her a wink and smiles as she rolls her eyes and fights a smirk.

"Who's your friend?" the silky voice sounds behind him again and Will turns back to her with a considering eye.

"I don't think I'm supposed to be giving interviews," he informs her, ignoring her question and stuffing his hands into the pockets of his jeans casually. "Jack wasn't exactly fond of the last article you wrote about me."

Blue eyes tilt skyward, and the small huff the reporter releases makes the lock of hair that hangs along the side of her face quiver. “Jack Crawford probably wasn’t fond of getting into trouble for letting a civilian come on board and finish the job more effectively that he could. Don’t let him take it out on you.”

Will studies her too-earnest eyes, the slight tilt of her pink lips, the stance of her slender body that is somehow both open and casual *and* closed and guarded. He turns over her words, the subtle offering of praise and the attempt at fostering camaraderie and sympathy. Hannibal may take umbrage with her poor grammar, but Will has to admit that Freddie Lounds holds a fierce streak of cleverness within her.

“What was it like to stumble into a murder scene that almost became your own?”

Will blinks at the abrupt direction change of the conversation. “You don’t need information from me, Freddie. Not with that inside source of yours,” he quirks an eyebrow at her, taking a step back to signal the end of their conversation.

“My source can’t provide me with the answers I want. Namely, who you are and where you came from. How the hell you ended up working for the FBI with no experience is also at the top of my list.”

“I’m enrolled at Quantico--”

“As of last week, yes, I know. That wasn’t the case during the last investigation. All my source can tell me is that you walk around crime scenes with your eyes closed and that you stabbed Tobias Budge sixteen times.”

Will scoffs at that, his arms finding a home across his chest. “Try ten. I was fighting for my life, I’m not some crazed psychopath--” he freezes as her lips twitch with a smirk and her bright eyes flash with something like victory. “Fuck. Okay, well played,” he concedes with a smirk of his own. He huffs out a self-deprecating chuckle as he rubs the back of his neck. “Shit. Don’t suppose I can convince you to keep that bit off the record?”

“I’m a journalist, Mr. Graham,” she states primly, as if he were unaware of that fact. “Nothing is off the record.”

“And I suppose telling you that there’s really no story to be found with me will only make you think I’m hiding something,” Will guesses.

Those eyes flash again, a well-groomed eyebrow tipping upwards at the suggestion. “I remember meeting you, Mr. Graham. Budge’s first crime scene? You told me yourself you were new to town and had no idea what was going on...seemed awfully interested, though. Within a matter of weeks you were consulting for the FBI and stabbed a man to death. You expect me to believe that there's no story there?”

Will grits his teeth, can feel the muscle tick in his jaw just as surely as Lounds can see it. He bites back any sort of retort, opting to seethe in silence; he has a feeling anything he might say would only get twisted against him, and he has given the irritating woman more than enough fuel already.

“Will?”

They both turn their attention back to Abigail, approaching hesitantly with an ice cream cone in each hand. Will moves to stand between them instinctively. “I’m finished speaking with you, Miss Lounds. You may want to take care to tread lightly; it wouldn’t do to make enemies with the FBI. You’ve already stepped on a few toes and I can’t imagine Crawford will have anything nice to say to you about it.”

“Jack Crawford has the freedom granted by the Constitution to say whatever he likes,” Lounds points out as Will turns his back on her and accepts a scoop of mint chocolate chip from Abigail with a tight smile. “Just like I do.”

He’d like to imagine that she talks a big game, but can’t push away the feeling of unease that settles in the back of his mind at her ominous words.

They make it home before Hannibal and Abigail suggests starting on dinner to surprise him.

“My mom taught me a few recipes before I left home...if you think he might like that?”

He can’t help but smile at her uncertainty, though neither can he blame her. Hannibal is an intimidating man, elegance and refinement personified; he makes very certain that no one sees through the person-suit he dons. Will may be the only one who has ever been afforded the opportunity--and lived for longer than five minutes afterwards, at least.

“I think he would love anything you’d make him, kid,” Will tells her honestly. Hannibal hasn’t yet been afforded the opportunity to bond with Abigail the way that Will has, but he seems taken with her all the same. She’s been in Baltimore for one day but already he has glanced in Hannibal’s direction multiple times to see him studying the girl with a soft fondness. “I’m glad you’ve got some tricks up your sleeve because beyond frying fish from the bayou I’m pretty hopeless.”

“We should do it, then. I think it would be nice, to thank him that way.”

Will agrees and together they scope out the contents of the fridge and pantry. Abigail practically salivates at all of the fresh ingredients before her.

“I haven’t been away from home for that long, but I really miss eating fresh food. God...these steaks are beautiful,” she breathes, picking up one of the shrink-wrapped packages.

“And there’s three of them,” Will points out and they grin at each other.

It all starts very civilized: Abigail proclaims they have just the right ingredients for pan-seared steak and baby red mashed potatoes, and Will points out a lovely bunch of asparagus and states that he feels fairly confident replicating the side he had helped Hannibal with a few weeks prior.

They are in the process of prepping the potatoes (Will scrubs the hell out of them with the vegetable brush under cold water and passes them off to Abigail, who quarters them so neatly

that Will considers asking her to help improve his knife technique. Hannibal would never say it out loud but Will knows his uneven dicing has the man grimacing internally.) when the shadow that had been trailing after them since their conversation the night before descends suddenly.

“Are you going to tell the FBI?” Abigail asks abruptly, her doe-eyes never leaving the cutting board before her.

Will’s hands pause under the water for a moment, the bristles of his scrubber smashed into the skin of the potato in his left hand. A breath later, he finishes the spud off with two more scrubs and passes it along. “Is there a reason that I shouldn’t?” he asks evasively as he starts on the next potato.

She is silent slicing through the next two potatoes handed to her and then she sets down her knife and twists her body toward his. “I think there must be, if you haven’t called them yet. I just don’t know if your reason is the same as mine.”

“What’s your reason, Abigail?” he asks, staring hard at the red sphere in his hand, scrubbing harder.

“He’s still my dad,” she whispers it, as though she were ashamed of that fact. Ashamed to be related, ashamed to love him still.

“Of course he is,” Will responds, unsurprised with her answer; he tries to convey with those four words the other things that Abigail wants to hear. It’s okay to fear him and still love him. It’s okay to want to protect him. He chews on his bottom lip as he finishes the last potato and passes it over to her. When the water has been turned off, he twists his body to lean against the sink to face her. “What do you think my reason is?”

A tremor runs through her as she considers the question, so fine that Will might not have noticed it at all except for the fact that the last potato she slices into ends up in uneven pieces. She sets down the knife again and steps back from the counter, taking a deep breath as she stares at the potato chunks. A breath later she’s reigned it in, steps forward to scoop up the pieces and drop them into the saucepan at her side. “I couldn’t really say,” she lies.

Will lets her lie, suggests, in fact, that they fuck off with the rest of this heavy conversation and break into some wine while they finish their meal prep. *Mise en place,* Abigail calls it, referencing her pseudo-education gained from watching the Food Network all those weeks that she could make it into a hotel, and Will smiles because he knows he has heard Hannibal utter the phrase multiple times like he assumed that Will had known what it meant.

He dips into the cellar and finds a bottle of red that he knows he likes, thinks Abigail might like as well. It’s a sweet and tart wine, a strawberry rhubarb blend that Hannibal would know exactly with what to pair it and would likely shudder at the thought of it being served out of the summer season. It goes down easy and leaves a pleasant head-buzz after only two glasses and those are the aspects that matter to Will.

It’s not long before Will’s phone gets connected to the Bluetooth speakers and a ‘Top 40's’ playlist is found on Pandora. Will didn’t even know they *did* things like the Top 40's

anymore, and in any case it's nothing he recognizes and all sounds like repetitive dubstep to him, but he smiles to see Abigail bopping around as she minces up garlic, lips moving occasionally to mouth some lyrics, and can't find it in himself to complain about the genre. It's too heartwarming to see her so carefree for the first time since he left her all those weeks ago and he'd put up with just about any sort of music to witness this moment.

He does resolve to introduce her to some of the finer classic rock before long, however.

From the moment the idea sprouted in Hannibal's mind, he knew that things would change. He knew bringing that lovely, wild boy into his home would upset his routine, though he was certain it would happen in all the ways that he could abide. No longer would he drift through his days alone, unknown.

It was a great risk to invite Will Graham in, but he had, in the ensuing months, reaped great rewards.

The addition of a teenage girl was unexpected, but not wholly unpleasant. She seems a neutral entity between them; striving to act with propriety in Hannibal's presence but able to relax with Will. Perhaps a little too much, if the ruckus that greets him in the garage through the kitchen door is any indication. Opening the door only increases the din as awful bass-heavy music blares through his sound system, likely something just relevant enough for Hannibal to despise.

Will and Abigail stand in the kitchen near the stove; neither of the two notice his entrance, both of their faces glued to the screens of their phones as they argue over something above the noise. Hannibal strides over to the control panel for the speakers in the kitchen and cuts the volume.

They both of them start, jumping to attention at the interruption; Will nearly loses his phone to the floor, his hands fumbling to catch the device halfway down. He eyes the wine glasses on the counter, the half-empty bottle pushed off to the side, and then two red-cheeked faces laced with embarrassment and guilt.

"Welcome home--" Abigail begins.

"What temperature do you roast the asparagus at?" Will cuts straight to the chase. Ah, that must be what each of them were attempting to look up on their phones.

"350 degrees," he informs them, amusement flitting through him as Abigail abruptly turns toward Will and smacks his arm. It seems that had been her guess as well. "You're cooking dinner," he states, for that is, indeed, what they appear to be doing, raiding of the cellar aside. If someone had told him six months previous that he would return home to find two boisterous and half-tipsy youths cooking in his kitchen and feel nothing but contentment for it, Hannibal would have recommended that individual take a one-way trip to the BSHCI.

"This is Abigail's show," Will declares, stepping over to the oven to set the preheat temperature. He tilts his head as Hannibal passes by, entreating a kiss, which Hannibal grants

swiftly. “Show her where the thyme is?”

A glance in the girl’s direction shows her cheeks pink and eyes cast away from them. When she dares to meet his gaze a moment later he beckons her to follow to the herb wall in the dining room.

“I hope I’m not intruding,” she murmurs as she plucks at some sprigs of thyme. “Will said the kitchen is sort of your domain.”

“No intrusion,” Hannibal denies, intrigued to find that he actually means it. He wouldn’t let just anyone have free reign of his kitchen, after all. “It’s a very kind gesture.” She flashes him a shy smile and he thinks, not for the first time since she entered their home, of Mischa. He thinks his sister would have grown into a tenacious young woman just like Abigail; soft, but sturdy.

“Pan’s ready!” comes Will’s shout from the kitchen.

Hannibal nods toward the call. “Why don’t you continue on? I’ll set the table--I don’t know that I trust Will to handle my china this evening,” he confides. Abigail’s laughter sounds much more pleasant than her music, though Hannibal makes a mental note to introduce the girl to the moving and fulfilling scores of the Classical genre--perhaps she may even be interested in an opera or two.

The steaks are seared in a cast iron skillet, cooked to a perfect medium rare and basted generously with butter, garlic and thyme. The baby red potatoes are done in a simple skin-on mash with garlic, milk, butter and parmesan. Will even manages a decent replication of the asparagus side that Hannibal had taught him a few weeks prior. All in all it is a modest offering but cooked superbly and with kind intentions; Hannibal is very pleased.

They clean the kitchen as a unit, Abigail drying the dishes that Hannibal washes and passing them off to Will, who knows where everything goes. While they work, Abigail suggests types of cars for Will to look into test driving, offering mostly outlandish and extravagantly priced vehicles, to Will’s increasing annoyance. When Hannibal joins in by suggesting a reasonably priced, pre-owned Maserati, Will throws up his hands and declares himself done with the both of them.

For the next few days, Hannibal and Will fall back into their normal routine; Abigail seems to somehow slot right in effortlessly, as though the space she now occupies had always been open for her. She takes on the role of sous chef, helping Hannibal prepare dinner while Will sits at the island and watches them fondly, his chief job ensuring that no one’s wine glass sits empty. He could not say what trouble she gets into during the day with only Will for entertainment, but in the evenings after dinner she adjourns to the study with them, curled up in a chair by the fireplace to read while Will does the same on the couch and Hannibal sketches.

The night Abigail had cooked dinner, Will had mentioned to Hannibal as they settled in for bed that the subject of turning her father over to the FBI had arisen; Will admitted that he

summarily evaded the question. When Hannibal asked him if he had yet to speak to Jack Crawford because he wanted to handle Hobbs himself, Will evaded that question as well. None of them bring up the subject again, though it always sits in the room with them, lurking in a corner and waiting to be acknowledged. Hannibal knows that sooner or later they must make a decision, certain that Will knows that as well, but his love is joyful and carefree with the young lady around, and so he lets every ample opportunity slip by unseized.

He's just lamenting the fact that Will will no doubt feel terribly guilty when another girl goes missing--Hobbs is overdue to take another one, after all--and resolves to speak to him about the matter in private later on when Will goes stiff on the couch across from him and closes the book in his lap, pulls the buzzing phone from his pocket. If Hannibal had had any doubts as to who the caller was, Will's quick glance to Abigail before he answers settles them.

"Jack," Will says, and just like that the carefree, playful mood that had ensconced them through the last three days flexes and shatters. Hannibal dislikes the way Will's bright eyes darken when Jack Crawford comes calling, wonders if it was perhaps a misstep to introduce them so quickly. Jack latched on to Will's unique perspective and insight, just as Hannibal knew he would, but he's been less than gentle with the empath and quite demanding besides.

Jack is upset about something, that much is clear, and Hannibal doesn't think that it's in regards to another missing girl in Minnesota. He very clearly catches the name 'Freddie Lounds' though he's sitting several feet away from Will. Will's hesitant expression has twisted into a grimace.

"Jack, I'm sor--" Will's apology is halted by another stream of barked words. "I didn't--" he tries again, is again interrupted quickly. "Yeah, I got it," Will confirms sullenly. "See you tomorrow."

The tension is palpable when Will pulls the phone from his ear. Hannibal watches his fingers flex around the rectangle, knuckles whitening for a moment before Will takes a deep breath and sets it down on the end table next to him with deliberate gentleness. Across the room, Abigail peers at him over the book in her lap, dark brows knit together in concern.

"Fucking Freddie Lounds," Will grits out. "Freddie god*damn--"* he glances over to Hannibal. "Your tablet in here?" Hannibal indicates that it is docked on the kitchen charger and Will is up and moving before he can inquire about the very one-sided conversation that just took place.

He stalks back into the study, tablet in hand, less than a minute later and throws himself back onto the couch. Making assumptions from the mutterings falling from Will's frowning lips, Hannibal assumes he is pulling up Tattlecrime to view an article and abandons his sketchpad to move to the couch as well.

"She wrote about you again," Hannibal murmurs as Will taps the link to an article entitled 'WILL GRAHAM REVEALED - FBI MAD DOG NEEDS A LEASH' with a bit more force than necessary.

"She cornered us at the mall *three days ago,"* Will huffs as the page loads. "I thought she'd decided to just let things lie." He looks as though he's about to continue speaking when the

article finally finishes loading and they are both caught off guard to see a picture at the top of it. A picture of Will at the mall, exiting a clothing store; beside him, a smiling Abigail, the red retail bag in her hand at the apex of a swing.

Beside him Will shifts; he looks as though he may be sick.

'Last week I reported on the demise of Tobias Budge, the killer known as the Maestro, and the man responsible for stopping his reign of terror in Baltimore. Will Graham, pictured above with an unknown acquaintance, sustained an injury requiring surgery at John Hopkins shortly after uncovering the identity of the Maestro. It seems he is since in good health, though upon attempting an interview this reporter found his attitude rather lacking.

As stated in last weeks article, it is unknown how Will Graham, a civilian with no education nor formal training, ended up involved with the FBI in the first place. My attempts to collect answers were met with (from the FBI) complete silence and (from Mr. Graham) surly sarcasm, thinly veiled threats, and an unabashed admission at having stabbed Budge ten times (a number which, correct me if I'm wrong, seems questionably high for a man that claims to work with law enforcement).

Having received no response from the Bureau and only hostility from Mr. Graham, this reporter decided to do some digging on my own. Do we not, after all, have an unapologetic right to know exactly who it is the federal government deems fit to keep its citizens safe? What I found was shocking. As previously stated, this man does not have any previous ties to government or law enforcement, nor any formal education beyond a smattering of forensics related classes taken online over the course of the last several years (though I have been informed that he's finally deemed it fit to officially enroll at the Quantico Training Academy). The reason that no one knows who Will Graham is is precisely due to that: he is no one. That is to say, for the last twelve years he has been employed with Brighthouse Entertainment as a travelling carnival attendant--first as a sanitation worker and then later as a game booth renter.

You read that correctly, America. The man that the FBI enlisted to help catch dangerous killers is nothing more than a carney. This of course begs the question once more of how and why in the world such a man decided to place roots in Baltimore and get involved with the FBI. One thing that I can tell you with absolute certainty: Based on the carefree day of shopping he was entrenched in only one week after invasive surgery, based on the way he delighted in threatening me with the power of the FBI and the blase and unapologetic way he described stabbing a man to death ten times, I have come to realize one thing.

I may not know the how of his association with the FBI but I now understand the why: Will Graham is good at catching killers. And hasn't it always been said that it takes one to know one?'

Hannibal glances over to Will when he finishes the ludicrous article. His jaw his is clenched tight, nostrils flaring with his ire and eyes staring hard at the empty space in front of him.

"I'm going to kill her."

Chapter End Notes

Dear Everyone: Thank you for reading and being patient while I take forever to update and I love you.

Also again, SO hard when editing to ignore Chrome being like "umm...hey, you really gonna leave this like this?" during Freddie's article. XD

Also I'm on Tumblr.

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Will, Hannibal and Abigail discuss battle plans; Will works out some pent-up aggression.

Chapter Notes

I know, I know. I'm sorry! T_T

This took forever and I could blame craziness at work and getting distracted by Summertime Slick and all manner of other things, but all I really want to say is: Thank you. Thank you for your patience, thank you for returning to read this when it was finally ready. I hope it was worth your wait!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will had tapped into some pretty incredible rage when he had fought Budge, but even then the boiling anger hadn't overpowered his senses the way it does now. His vision is black on the edges as he glares down at the tablet in his hands, the ringing in his ears drowning out all outside stimulus.

It isn't until he feels the warmth of a palm wrap securely around the back of his neck that Will becomes aware of Hannibal saying his name. He blinks, turns to look at the man next to him. Hannibal is just as displeased as he is--Will can see the cold spark of contempt burning in his eyes, notes that his mouth is set in a thin line. "Can we?" the question comes on a breath, and though Hannibal doesn't deny him, his eyes flicker to where Abigail has come to stand before them.

Her skin is even more pale than usual, her wide eyes staring down at the tablet in Will's lap. He must have scrolled back to the top when he finished reading, because the picture of her and Will stares up at them from the screen. She looks as though she may be sick and somehow Will knows what she's going to say before she says it, and his blind rage gives way to an anxiety that churns his own stomach as well.

"My dad reads Tattlecrime."

Will is up then, dropping the tablet to his empty spot on the couch and pacing halfway across the room, heads back to where he started to snatch up his phone. "She'll take it down," he

tells Abigail, vaguely aware that Hannibal is saying his name again but ignoring it all the same. “I’ll make her take it down.”

He only gets as far as unlocking his phone before Hannibal is standing beside him, grasping his wrist lightly. “How do I contact her?”

“You can’t,” Hannibal denies, his hand slipping down to Will’s to gently extricate the rectangle from his grasp. “You’ll only confirm that there’s a story for her to sniff out if you do.” He turns his gaze to his lover, feeling absolutely helpless. Hannibal’s solemn expression only increases the weight of the sinking feeling blossoming in Will’s gut. “Freddie Lounds is a nuisance, but she’s not our greatest threat right now.”

Will swallows around the lump in his throat, feels sick all over again when he considers the meeting he’s been called into the next morning. “Jack,” he sighs, and Hannibal nods.

They decide to move to the dining room to discuss the situation and Hannibal retreats to the kitchen to make some coffee while Will argues in circles with Abigail about the necessity of her presence. It would be easier to get a grasp on the situation, to attempt to form some kind of plan of action, if he could speak freely with Hannibal. He cannot speak freely with Abigail present.

“I’m eighteen years old, Will, you don’t have to try to protect me from this. I’m already in it.”

“To be fair,” Hannibal chimes in as he returns from the kitchen with three coffees, sugar and cream on a tray, “Abigail is affected by what is decided tonight most of all, Will. It’s only appropriate that she be part of the discussion.”

Will sighs and rubs at his face, sinking heavily into a seat at the table as he realizes that he is now outnumbered. “Okay,” he concedes with a nod as he reaches for one of the coffees. “Okay. So there’s nothing to be done about the article.” He begins, glances toward Hannibal, “You’re sure?”

“Admitting to Freddie Lounds that Abigail is important in any way will only throw fuel on the fire. Best to cut our losses and concentrate on what we will do about Jack,” he tells Will, “and your father,” he adds to Abigail; he doesn’t look any happier about it than Will is.

“The father is our first concern. Jack’s upset about the article but he doesn’t know Abigail, might not even connect that she looks like the missing girls. We don’t know what, exactly, he wants to talk to me about tomorrow. What we do know is that Abigail’s father will see the article, if he hasn’t already, and know where to find her.” Will takes a sip of his coffee and levels his gaze across the table to the young woman. “What’s most important is keeping you safe.”

Abigail’s eyes track across the empty space between them as she wets her lips. “If he knows I’m in Baltimore with you, then you’re in danger too.”

“Don’t worry about Will, Abigail. He’s more than capable of taking care of himself,” Hannibal assures her. There is a fractional tipping of his head while Hannibal appears to contemplate something. “Perhaps we ought to simply go to Jack; explain to him who Abigail is and what she thinks she knows,” he suggests, amending the truth to protect Abigail from prosecution. “He could place her into protective custody until her father is apprehended.”

Abigail stiffens at the suggestion, her pink lips pulling down into a frown.

“Abigail,” Will begins, heaves a sigh. “You do know that we can’t allow your father to go on killing girls forever. He has to be stopped.”

“I know,” she insists, her eyes drop down to stare at her hands as she picks at her fingernails nervously. “I know he does. It’s just...difficult...to think of him locked up like that.”

“I don’t like the thought of Abigail in FBI custody,” Will admits, frowning into his coffee. “Jack is too...if he even *thinks* that she was aware of what her father was doing, he’s going to be difficult to deal with. The timing of her leaving home is too damning.”

“I have a home a few hours outside of the city on Chesapeake Bay. Abigail could stay there for the time being. Even if her father see the article, decides to come to Baltimore, she’ll be far away. Safe.”

Silence reigns over the table as all three of them pointedly ignore the question of what to do if her father *does* turn up in Baltimore.

Will looks to Hannibal, the panicked tension that had been coiled tight in his chest since reading the article beginning to loosen at last. “Can you take her there tomorrow while I have my meeting with Jack?”

“Of course,” Hannibal nods. “I only have one morning client to reschedule,” he excuses himself to his office, presumably to do just that, and when it’s just the two of them left in the room, Abigail sags with a sigh and drops her head to the table.

“I’m sorry my family is so fucked up,” she mutters into the wood grain. “Thank you for this.”

Will huffs and can’t help his fond smile despite the situation. To see the wall of propriety that surrounds Abigail when Hannibal is near crumble to dust when he’s not makes Will’s chest swell with warmth. The fact that she’s so comfortable being herself around Will is heartening, and the fact that she is clever enough to realize that she should dial back in Hannibal’s presence lends credence to her intelligence, however often she attempts to hide it. She was smart enough, after all, to see what was happening and escape her father before she couldn’t.

“Thank Hannibal,” he replies wryly, “He’s the one with all the answers.” When she only lets out a sigh in response, Will suggests that she get some sleep. “I’ll take care of these,” he adds, gathering up their abandoned coffees.

Hannibal finds him at the sink, presses a kiss to the nape of his neck. Will lets the tension drop from his shoulders as the man nuzzles closer, pressing himself to the length of Will’s back. “She will be alright, sweet boy. Far from here. Safe.”

“Yes, she will be safe, if her father comes to Baltimore,” Will agrees as he rinses the last mug and sets it aside in the drying rack. He turns his back to the sink, so that he and Hannibal are pressed chest to chest. “I noticed that you were deliberately vague about what to *do* about Garrett Jacob Hobbs, should he make an appearance. Are we turning him over to Jack?” he inquires, tilts his head down to nuzzle into the base of Hannibal’s throat. “Saving him for ourselves, perhaps?”

“You should see what Jack knows, before we make a definitive decision about Garrett Jacob Hobbs,” Hannibal tells him.

Will leans against the strength of his lover and, because he doesn’t know what else to do, nods in agreement.

“I think you’ll enjoy staying in this house,” Hannibal tells Abigail as they fly down the interstate. “It’s private, but not too far from town if you need supplies. There is a car there that you can use. Of course, I’ll make sure you have the funds for whatever you need. It sits on a cliff over the bay, with paths for walking, if you wish for fresh air--though I must advise against doing so during or after a rainstorm.”

In the passenger seat, Abigail nods. She had spent the first thirty minutes of the drive sitting stock straight and silent, though Hannibal was pleased to see the tension progressively leave her as they put more and more miles between themselves and Baltimore. Now, an hour out of the city, she sits slumped in her seat with her legs stretched out, her head resting against the cool glass of her window as she watches the trees fly by.

“What do you think that guy is talking to Will about?” she asks abruptly.

“I’m sure Will will tell us as soon as he can.”

“Do you think he knows about me?” There is a slight tremble in her voice as she speaks; Hannibal’s nose twitches as the acrid scent of fear permeates the vehicle. “I mean, if he’s with the FBI...If he saw my picture he could find out who I am, couldn’t he?”

Hannibal weighs that assessment for a moment before relinquishing with a nod. “It’s true that he could potentially find your match with your DMV photo. But the odds that he saw that picture and found any interest in you is low, I think. Freddie Lounds did not paint a good picture of Will *or* the FBI with that article, and Jack is a man that is under a great amount of scrutiny from his superiors.”

For a time they are silent, but for the soft symphonies that trickle through the speakers. Hannibal listens to the classical music, he listens to Abigail’s soft, even breathing, he listens to the scratch of the pavement beneath his tires, and he thinks.

Abigail Hobbs is a sweet girl, on her best behavior around himself, he thinks, but capable of getting into mischief. He recalls the morning that Will had called him to ask for money to leave with Abigail--they had been out drinking the evening before and Will was amused by the sorry state the teenager had found herself in the next morning. He wonders if Will views

Abigail as the sibling he was never afforded. He so often exhibits behavior in regards to her as an older brother might--protective, but lenient. Certainly he would have confiscated her fake identification rather than encourage her to drink underage, if he felt himself a father figure.

They were oddly tight-knit, for having only truly bonded in those last few weeks that Will was with the Company. It spoke volumes about his lover, that he was able to form connections so deep so quickly with people--that remarkable empathy. It had certainly worked in Hannibal's favor, tempting the boy with security and companionship and then sealing his fate with pleasure.

"Do you want to talk about your father, Abigail?" he asks her. When she stiffens once more, he elaborates, "Specifically, why you don't wish to see him incarcerated?"

She shifts in her seat and then sighs; he can feel when her gaze is pulled to him, see it in his periphery. "How would you feel seeing your father arrested? Spending the rest of his life in prison?"

Hannibal's father would have never seen the inside of a jail cell, though he can't very well tell Abigail that.

"If my father had killed me six times over I should think that I would feel justified in seeing him there. In being the one to put him there." He waits for a moment, and when she doesn't respond, presses forward. "I don't believe it's that you don't wish for your father to live the rest of his life in prison that is halting your action, Abigail. I suspect it is more to do with the fact that you don't wish for your father to go on living at all."

He tosses a glance her way to confirm that shock and terror have taken residence on her young, freckled face. "I--" she begins, but Hannibal takes mercy on her; he can be merciful, after all, when he chooses to be.

"It's a perfectly natural emotion, Abigail, trust me. Your father has imagined killing you countless times, killed you in effigy half a dozen times. What harm is there in allowing yourself this one small thought? I would argue, in fact, that it could be quite therapeutic for you."

"Too easily thoughts can turn to actions," she responds softly, her wide eyes darting away to stare at the road as it disappears beneath them.

"Yes," Hannibal agrees.

"I'm trying very hard to understand how something like this happens," Jack begins before Will even has his second foot over the threshold. "*Especially* when I've already told you to *stay away from Freddie Lounds!"*

Will is embarrassed to admit that he startles a bit when Jack's rich timbre raises in volume until the walls are ringing by the end of his sentence. "Perhaps you should get a court order

for her to stay away from me," Will suggests. "I can hardly stop her from being in a public place, or doing her own research."

He sees immediately that attempting to defend himself was a foolish endeavor. If he were a cartoon character, Jack would no doubt have steam pouring from his ears.

"She can go anywhere she pleases," Jack agrees, though he doesn't sound too happy about it, "But she can't make you give her ammo for her trash blog. Not one more word, Will, I mean it. No statements about the FBI, no how-do-you-dos--If you're walking down the street and see Freddie Lounds is on fire you walk on by and call *me."*

Will nods, opens his mouth to express his complicity, but then Jack is speaking again.

"One more word to her, and your career with the FBI is over before it begins, you got that?"

He can't stop his jaw from clenching at the threat. "Yes, Jack," he agrees shortly.

"Sit," Jack barks, nodding to the empty chair in front of his desk. Will does so, his stomach heavy with unease. He had hoped this would be a simple chewing out, but it seems as though Jack isn't quite done with him yet. He knows that can only mean one thing. "Who's the girl?" Will plays dumb, twisting his expression into something quizzical; Jack continues before he can even open his mouth to say 'What girl?'. "The girl you were with in the photo, Will, who is she?"

His shoulders raise in a shrug and he leans back in his chair, hoping like Hell that the air of nonchalance he's putting off is a convincing one. "She's just a friend. From the Company. She came for a visit."

"She looks a little young for you," Jacks says pointedly; his eyes dart to his computer screen and Will would bet that he's got that damn article pulled up.

"She's just a friend," Will repeats. He stares at the man across from him, the unease that had twisted in his belly the night before resurfacing to disagree with his breakfast. He decides to bite the bullet, throw himself at the mercy of the Director and attempt to get his focus off of Abigail before he can give the girl too much thought. "Look, I'm sorry, Jack. I know I said it before, but it won't happen again."

"It won't," Jack agrees with a stern nod.

Will stands, attempts not to appear too eager as he makes his way to the door.

"Any breakthroughs on the Minnesota cases?"

The words ring out behind him and Will freezes, does his best not to let the tension that threatens to tighten his shoulders show. "No, nothing yet," he responds, his back still turned to Jack as he reaches for the doorknob.

"Your friend," he continues, and Will pauses once again. "She looks an awful lot like the girls gone missing."

Will schools his expression into something bordering on vaguely interested before he glances over his shoulder. “Does she?”

“Any idea where your friend is from? Before she joined the Company.”

Will’s mouth twists into a slight frown as he gives a listless shrug. “Never asked.”

He makes it out the door before Jack can respond to that, his heart pounding so hard as he struggles to keep a nonchalant pace that he can feel his pulse in his ears. It doesn’t begin to slow until he exits the building and his car is in sight.

He has plenty of time after his meeting to thoroughly pace through the house, half-wishing he had suggested that Hannibal and Abigail wait to depart so that he could make the trip with them. It would defeat the purpose, he knew--the purpose being to get Abigail out of Baltimore as quickly and quietly as possible--but he can’t quell the rising anxiety within him at not knowing exactly what is happening.

The house itself is a few hours outside the city, Hannibal had said that much. And of course he would show Abigail around the nearby town that she would need to navigate on her own, ensure that she was settled in before he left her. It all takes time.

Will regrets not suggesting that they stay the evening; that he could drive out to meet them as soon as he had finished with his meeting. They could have cooked dinner together, eaten at the table together as a family in whatever swanky cliff-side palace Hannibal deemed nice enough to be his safehouse. They could have settled in together, lit a fire and spent their evening as they usually did, as if nothing was wrong.

Instead Abigail would sit there alone; read, perhaps, or watch television, if Hannibal even owns one (there certainly isn’t one present in the Baltimore brownstone). She would sit in a silent and empty house until she decided that it was time to sleep, and then she would retire to whatever bedroom she chose as her own. Alone. Defenseless.

In the meantime, Will is crawling out of his skin. He stalks into the wine cellar, set on selecting a bottle or two to decimate as he awaits his lover’s return--until he’s not as alone as Abigail--but decides after perusing the selection for a moment that getting tanked would no more lessen his anxiety than it would endear him to Hannibal when the man *did* finally make it home.

No, Will just simply needs to leave the house altogether. Perhaps he can find a way to distract himself until the space is no longer so desolately empty. Somehow, he remembers to grab his jacket on his way out the door.

The bar is...well, it’s a shit hole. A complete dive. The kind of place that’s still filled with the pungent smoke of cigarettes despite the anti-smoking indoors laws that have been in place for

several years. The kind of place that has more than one regular ducking into its doorway by eleven A.M. The kind of place men frequent to get drugs, pussy, or completely fucked up.

Despite his earlier decision *not* to raid the wine cellar for the same reason, Will is considering the latter as he sips at his cheap whiskey, and does his best to convey a convincing air that he's not after the other two; he's in no mood to be approached for any bullshit. He relishes the burn of the liquid as it slips down his throat--since he took up with Hannibal he hasn't imbibed any alcohol that actually *burned* when you drink it. Sometimes you just need a reminder that you aren't drinking as a leisurely pastime, nor to appreciate the smokey flavor of a well-aged bourbon, but are drinking simply to *drink.* To forget, perhaps, or drown sorrows, soothe anxiety.

He's only there to get out of the silent house and sip the shit liquor and try to pretend that his life is what it had been mere months before--just for a moment. He hadn't come to the bar looking for someone to kill, but that is what he finds.

He used to kill quite frequently. Ironically, since he met Hannibal he had rarely lifted a knife, save to butter his bread. Perhaps that was where some of the restlessness, that unrelenting itch of containment, had sprung up from, in addition to recent situations. He is happy with Hannibal, certainly. But Hannibal maintains an unerring control over his desires; the Rolodex of business cards he keeps around to pluck from at leisure is evidence enough of this. Names that had offended him and sat unpunished for *years* because the meticulous man was biding his time. Will can recall an instance where a carnival goer muttered the word 'faggots' as he passed by his booth, where Will happened to be flirting heavily with a thick, muscle-clad and *very* thirsty young man. The flirtatious patron had bristled but Will had encouraged him to forget about it, distracting him with his phone number and telling him that he would be free later that evening.

The asshat that had insulted them was choking on his own blood an hour later. An hour after that, Will was riding the horny blond like it was his last day on Earth. That had been nearly a year ago and, ironically, had been the first and last time Will had sought out anonymous sex until he met Hannibal.

He doesn't pay the man any mind as he slides onto the barstool next to Will, save for the awareness of their arms brushing briefly as he settles in. He simply stares at the amber liquid in his--as he's just recently noticed--not-so-clean tumbler, and sips it in silence. He can feel the eyes on him, quick glances turning to lingering looks, until finally the man shifts and brushes his thigh quite deliberately against Will's.

"Here alone?" he murmurs, as though Will hasn't been sitting in silence and companionless for the last twenty minutes. He spares the man a glance and sees everything he needs to.

Will considers the question--and the man--for a moment; it only takes the span of him draining the rest of his glass to make his decision. He turns toward the interloper. "Not anymore," he purrs, his throat thick and stinging from the cheap booze; he doesn't bother with attempting to plaster a smile onto his face that would be too obviously fake.

The stranger smiles, though; a thing that, likely to many, would be guileless and charming. Will sees the dark and terrible nature of it, though. He can see exactly what would happen if

he were to place himself at the mercy of this seemingly friendly man.

He gives a small jerk of his head, slipping off of his stool and meandering casually toward the back exit of the seedy little bar. He doesn't stop or check to see if the man follows him--doesn't truly care if he does, really--but can tell that he does, anyways. He can feel that shiver of awareness, that self-conscious feeling of having a pair of eyes trained upon you just a bit too intently. If he had been anyone else, he might have felt like prey.

He slips out of the back door and into the alleyway, keeps his sauntering pace even as the voice chimes behind him, "Hey, hold up, sweetheart."

The man quickens his pace behind him to catch up, but Will continues on, turning down an adjoining alley in an attempt to get a bit further away from the bar, the still too-bright streets as the sun is still setting. No need to draw *too* much attention, after all. He only gets a block and a half away before his company grows impatient and grabs for him. He seizes Will's upper arm, halting him in his tracks before twisting their bodies to roughly press Will's back against the cool brick wall next to him.

"This is private enough," he informs Will, voice husky with his slight panting at their previously brisk pace.

Will doesn't startle, doesn't even blink at the change in dynamic as the man presses the length of his body against him. "If you say so," he agrees listlessly. He expects the man to rut against him, begin working at removing the clothing between them, perhaps even to kiss him--he doesn't expect the cool stretch of metal that appears at his throat.

"Alright, pretty boy," he grunts as his free hand paws at Will--not to feel him up, but to check his pockets. "I can see by your clothes alone you've got *something* on you. I don't know what you were doing in that shithole and I don't care. Just give up the wallet and phone and you're free to go."

Will resists the urge to laugh, barely, and lets out a soft sigh. "All this shit must be throwing me off my game. I had you pegged as a sexual deviant, but a *mugging?"* he sighs again, relaxing back against the wall behind him. "How pedestrian."

His distinct lack of fear must throw his attacker off quite thoroughly, for he falters in his pat-down of Will's pockets and has absolutely no foresight to see or stop the headbutt the strikes him squarely in the middle of his forehead. He stumbles back in shock, though his body moves quicker than his brain does, his knife-wielding hand swinging out blindly before him and his feet spreading to plant against the ground firmly to maintain his new position. It might have helped him, if Will had been any sort of person susceptible to the shock and horror of an armed mugging.

Instead, he plows forward, swinging his own forearm out to knock away the other man's as he sinks his shoulder into the man's sternum and drives him backwards into the opposite wall. He pins him there, and the man, startled and driven breathless, is laughably easy to subdue from there. Will wraps his hand around the wrist of his assailant's knife-wielding hand in a crushing grip, squeezing and twisting until he cries out and his grip falters. Will can

barely hear the clattering of the knife striking the asphalt over the sound of his fist meeting the other man's face.

He strikes him three times in quick succession, each impact resounding with an even wetter snap than the one previous, before pulling back slightly and turning his attention to the man's soft belly. He's gasping and spluttering and whining broken apologies and pleas between Will's blows, but it all falls on deaf ears. All Will can concentrate on is the anger and frustration that have been boiling within him for the last few days; his irritation with Freddie Lounds, his hatred for Garrett Jacob Hobbs, the crippling anxiety that Jack knows, or that he'll find out and take Abigail away. It all comes bubbling to the surface, red flashing around him that is soothed by the power, the absolute *thrill* that comes along with so completely fucking someone up.

He doesn't relent until he steps back and the man immediately crumples to the ground. The pleas have since died down; the only noise he makes now is a wet gurgling and a soft, grunting murmur, his head tilting this way and that hazily in a manner that suggests a fairly severe concussion. Will would bet that he's suffering from internal bleeding as well--he hadn't gone easy on the man's torso.

He bends down to hoist the man up slightly into a sitting position that appears a bit more natural at first glance, leaning him up against the nearby dumpster and turning his ruined face away from the opening of the alleyway. He lets his fingers linger on the fading pulse point of his neck, the beat beneath it thready and weak. Not long now. Will retrieves the knife, slightly surprised to see the slight sheen of red along its edge; his fingers go to his throat automatically, come away red and sticky. He must have pressed a bit to eagerly into the blade when he'd lunged forward for the headbutt. It's a mere scratch, so Will ignores it, wiping his stained fingers onto his pants as he considers the man below him. He could stick him once or twice in the gut to expedite the bleeding without it being too noticeable for passersby; the blade is too short to dig under the ribs and into the heart for a quick death.

In the end, Will wipes the blade off on his jeans and folds the knife closed to slip it into his pocket. He leans against the wall and slides down slowly to sit on the ground beside the dying man, intentionally expanding his frame to block the other so that anyone passing by that glances inwards would only see Will, sitting on the ground and thumbing through his phone. Hannibal had messaged him ten minutes prior, letting him know that he was just stopping off for gas and would likely be home in less than an hour's time.

He waits until the shallow, ragged breathing ceases beside him and then sits awhile longer, eyes shut and head tilted back against the cool brick behind him as he relishes in his power over life and death. It really has been too long since he's killed so indiscriminately--it's no wonder he's been so tense since Abigail showed up needing his guidance. He's not concerned with anyone noting his presence and connecting it to the dead body that will be found in this spot in perhaps only a few hours time; he's not heard a single soul pass by in the all the time they've been there--too chilly for much foot traffic, especially with the sun going down.

He gives himself a cursory brush-off when he stands, more to rub some warmth back into his bottom, which had quickly chilled from resting on the cold ground, rather than due to any

actual concern at having soiled his clothing. He doesn't even glance at the rapidly cooling corpse when he finally steps away.

He can't begin to describe the relief and comfort that spreads warmly through him when Will sees Hannibal's Bentley in the garage when he returns home. The scent of rosemary and butter assaults him as soon as he steps into the kitchen, and the warmth in his chest thickens and expands at the thought of Hannibal having arrived home to immediately start on dinner. Will wishes he had been there to greet him.

His lover is washing some asparagus when Will slips up behind him to press against his back and slip his arms around his middle. He can hear the fondness in Hannibal's greeting slip away quickly as Will nuzzles against his neck.

"Are you bleeding?"

"Bled," Will corrects, "Just a little."

Hannibal abandons the stalks of asparagus on his cutting board and turns around to face him, hands reaching up automatically to tilt his head to the side to better expose Will's throat for examination. "What happened?"

"Attempted mugging, of all things," Will tells him, though he's sure his disappointment carries through to Hannibal's perceptive ears. "I'm fine. It's fine. I handled it."

Hannibal hums softly at that, his eyes lingering on the dried streaks of red that line Will's throat. "And was this mugging encouraged in any way?"

Will huffs at that, his eyes pulling away to stare at the fridge. "You already know it was, so why ask?" he snaps back brusquely, sighs, "I feel better now," he adds softly, lets his body lean forward into the solid warmth of Hannibal.

"I am glad," his lover concedes, his hands running down the length of Will's torso. "Though I do wish you would come to me to work out such aggression. We could hunt *together,* love," he points out. "Or I could fuck it out of you."

Hearing such vulgarities pass from Hannibal's aristocratic lips always serves to send a jolt of arousal through Will, and he finds himself pressing closer, canting his hips in search of friction. He ducks his head down to mouth at the base of his throat. "You still could," he amends, his own hands slipping forward to clutch at Hannibal's sharp hips.

Hannibal hums again, bending his head to pull away from Will's mouth so he can latch his own to Will's throat instead. He lathes a hot, wet tongue across the line of broken skin on Will's throat, sweeping up the dried blood and irritating the closing wound until it begins to seep once more. He can't stop the appreciative whimper that shivers from his throat, nor can he stop his body from pressing as close as it can get, until their hips are rocking together, their thickening cocks chasing the friction. Will's hands at Hannibal's hips turn to claws and dig in as his lover continues to suck relentlessly against his wound.

“How--*fuck*--h-how much time on the roast?” Will pants as they writhe together. His hands slip beneath the sweater Hannibal had chosen to wear that day, fingers ghosting against the warm skin of his belly as Hannibal moves his mouth from Will’s neck to his lips.

“Time enough,” he rasps before capturing his mouth in a bruising kiss. He forces his tongue passed Will’s lips and Will can only moan at the taste of Hannibal’s tongue coated in his own blood.

Their hands work quickly to strip off shirts, and Will slips his fingers into the fur that spans Hannibal’s chest and grips it hard as his lover moves on to relieving Will of his jeans. He drops his head back and moans when his cock is freed from the confines of his pants, achingly hard and already dripping with arousal. Hannibal’s dry hand wraps around him loosely to pump teasingly as Will shifts and wiggles out of his pants as best as he can without moving his body from Hannibal’s.

“Her presence will be missed,” Hannibal’s hot breath bursts into Will’s ear and he can only moan, his knees buckling as arousal rips through him once more, “But I cannot say that I am not pleased to once again be able to take you whenever and wherever I would like.” Hannibal reaches across the counter, snatching up--what Will’s knows is--a bottle of olive oil and tipping it over to coat his fingers. Will knows, distantly, that he should feel at least a little ashamed of how easily and eagerly his legs part for Hannibal, but he also knows that it is a futile endeavor. Any lingering shame that he had felt at his submissiveness, his absolute pliancy to Hannibal, had long since been fucked out of him.

Will keens as multiple digits slip into him--it must be at least two, but perhaps even three--and slumps brokenly against Hannibal’s solid strength as he is systematically opened up. The fingers slide in and out of him easily, pressing deep and shallow and then deeply again, all while skirting *just* shy of his prostate. When Will attempts to cant his hips forward as Hannibal presses inside him once again, the man’s other hand shoots out to grip Will’s hip harshly in order to keep him still.

“So impatient today,” Hannibal murmurs against Will’s temple as he fingerfucks him slowly. “Off killing without me and now looking to get off without me as well…” he makes a scolding *tsk*ing sound, the same that Will would use on his dogs, and Will’s knees turn to jelly all over again.

“Then get inside me,” Will begs weakly, still attempting to grind his hips in time with Hannibal’s fingers, “and let’s get off together.”

“Demanding boy,” Hannibal chides, but does not stop Will when he reaches forward to tug Hannibal’s fly open. In fact, he slips his fingers from Will’s clenching hole--eliciting a frustrated whine from Will--and expedites the process by adding his nimble fingers to the mix and shoving his pants down far enough that he can simply step out of them.

He steps forward then, pushing Will backwards and crowding him against the counter until his arms wrap around him and hoist him up bodily to perch on the edge of the counter. Will immediately wraps his legs around his lover’s trunk, canting his hips to ensure an easy entrance. Hannibal presses forward and slides into Will effortlessly, thrusting deep until their

bodies are joined as closely as can be. Will let's a broken sob fall from his throat at the sensation.

This is what he was missing, what he was waiting for. The kill felt good, eased some of the tension, but *this* is therapeutic. This is how it should always be--he and Hannibal: together, inseparable, conjoined. Nothing feels as right as when Hannibal is buried to the root in Will.

His head drops back instinctively as he draws in ragged breaths that do nothing to quell his need for air, his hips working frantically to match the brutal pace that Hannibal has set without any preamble. His thick cock spears Will open, filling him completely, his angle perfect so he stimulates Will's prostate--rapidly growing over-sensitized--with each consecutive thrust. Will is vaguely aware that words are spilling from his mouth, though he can't be entirely sure as to what those words are. If it's a matter of stream of consciousness, then it is likely something akin to, "Yes, fuck, please, *more,* so good, harder, fuck, *harder, YES!"*

So lost he is in the sensations that Hannibal has stirred within him that Will's orgasm takes him almost by surprise. He gives one last guttural, keening cry as his cock pulses with his release, painting his stomach and chest as Hannibal continues to drill into him. And then he thrusts in fully one more time, halting when he's buried as far into Will as he can reach, and Will can feel Hannibal's own release pulse within him as the man buries his face in the crook of Will's neck and lets out a shuddering gasp.

They don't move from that position for several minutes, panting for breath against each other until Hannibal softens and slips easily from him, his release following closely behind. Will could adjourn to the restroom, clean himself up a bit before dinner, but then the oven timer chimes the readiness of the main course and all Will can think about it sitting at the dinner table, his hole sore, freshly fucked and still dripping Hannibal's come while he eats the meal that Hannibal has prepared for him.

He darts forward to press one more kiss to his lover before Hannibal pulls away to see to the meat, and then Will sets about turning his jeans the right way out and steps into them once more.

"Smells delicious, darlin."

Chapter End Notes

Your kudos and comments are life-sustaining.

Your follows, likes and reblogs on Tumblr are so greatly appreciated I can't even think of an appropriate metaphor.

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Hannibal gives Will a gift; Will and Hannibal visit the cliff house

Chapter Notes

My eternal thanks for all of your patience you lovely things!

This chapter is a bit shorter, and it's looking like the next one will be the last. I am hoping to get that up to you much quicker than I have been as of late.

I read and adore every single comment, even though I have been absolute shit at responding to them lately. Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The cliff house is beautiful, all sharp, modern lines and floor to ceiling windows that let in too much light during the daytime and too much darkness at night. Abigail feels exposed there in the evenings. Feels as exposed as she had felt when her father had suggested that she go learn more about Sasha Olsen, as exposed as she had felt when that asshole Private Investigator had shanghaied her leaving the restrooms at the carnival and told her he knew who she was, and that someone was looking for her. When she had sat trapped in the too-warm Bentley, the scent of well cared-for leather and Hannibal's smoky cedar cologne clogging her nostrils as they spoke about her father.

She spends most of her time in the guest room she has claimed as her own. Even without Will and Hannibal present, it feels rude to stray into the master bedroom, so she doesn't. She wants Will to be able to enjoy this house, after, and doesn't want to leave her presence in that space.

Hannibal had shown Abigail around the house, assuring her that she is to make herself at home here. She had gone with him into the nearby town and trailed after him as he swept through the aisles of the supermarket, collecting various sundries for her, asking occasionally if she has any experience cooking this or that. He makes a fine effort, so Abigail makes an effort to actually use the groceries he collected for her for the first few days before she breaks down and returns to the store for a few frozen pizzas and packages of instant ramen.

During the day, she busies herself with long walks along the bluffs, picking through Hannibal's extensive library and plucking out old half-forgotten tunes on the piano in the

living room.

At night, she thinks about what Hannibal said.

She thinks that he might have been right about what he said, even if she hadn't truly realized it until then. She wonders if it's one of those hyperbolic sorts of things, being so mad at her father that she could kill him.

She knows it's not.

Because it's not just anger that she feels; it's hurt and distrust and shame. She reckons it's even a little bit envy, what with him being able to so callously and carelessly--though she knows he's not *really* careless, or he'd have been caught by now--take something just because he wants it, even if that something is another person's life. His daughter's life.

She knows that it's not hyperbolic, because if it were, her mind wouldn't have had to bury it down; deep enough so that she could not see it at a glance, but shallow enough so that it could be excavated with only a few choice words from Hannibal. Hannibal, who, as it turns out, is quite an exceptional therapist.

The wind that howls here on the edge of the bluff wraps around the house and rattles her windows. Abigail lies in the dark and thinks about therapy.

Will is surprised and not to find that life generally returns to what it was before Abigail appeared on their doorstep. Hannibal works and Will prepares to join the Academy--and dodges Jack's inquiries about the missing Minnesota girls--and in the evenings they come together for food and wine and fucking.

There is a lot more texting with Abigail than before, which Will enjoys. He likes to think that the two of them keep each other occupied, Abigail sequestered away in isolation and Will left to his own devices while Hannibal sees his patients. They text and facetime and talk about the weather and Will's impending classes. Abigail laments missing out on Hannibal's cooking and Will laments the absence of her presence in their household and blushes when Abigail reminds him of a very livid and telling bruise that mars his upper neck that speaks to the distractions available to him in Baltimore.

Hannibal can sense Will's turmoil over the situation--Will doesn't try very hard to mask his anxieties, after all--and so it comes to pass that, six days after Abigail's departure from Baltimore, Hannibal wakes Will in the dead of night with a soft kiss and a murmured command to follow. Will is lead from the bedroom and down the stairs, even further down as they slip into the gaping maw of the open hatch in the pantry.

Will's heart stalls when they slip into the basement and he sees a shocking flash of red first and foremost--not blood, but the bold, riotous curls of the woman strapped and struggling against the steel table bolted to the floor. For a moment, he can't breathe, and though he knows that it's not *actually* Freddie Lounds that is bound and helpless in their basement; excitement arises swiftly within him all the same.

“It would be foolish to target Miss Lounds after such blatant and public attacks upon yourself had been posted to her blog,” Hannibal explains as Will steps closer to his offering. “But I found her berating an especially well-liked grocer of mine for not allowing her to combine expired coupons so that she may reduce an item to zero charge and found the likeness, in physicality and in rudeness, too great to ignore.”

Will releases a trembling breath as he comes to stand at the woman’s side. She is pale like Freddie, smooth, creamy skin blemished only by the red rings that circle her bound wrists and ankles. The red curls are an astonishing mimicry of Lounds’, though Will can see by the blunt edges of her cut and the stray locks that litter the floor that the effect of likeness was greatened because Hannibal had trimmed her hair. The effigy even has the sharp and cunning features of the original inspiration; Will might have guessed that the woman was a sister or cousin if he didn’t know any better. Her wide, blue eyes are filled with terror, just as Will wishes to see Lounds’.

He becomes aware that soft, muffled noises are attempting to breach the air at the same moment that he becomes aware that the woman is gagged. He pulls the fabric from her mouth, and immediately a stream of pleas washes across him like the waves of the ocean; flowing against and around his solid form, but not strong enough to move him. She flinches and attempts to draw down into the table she’s bound to when Will’s finger finally meets her lips to beckon her silence.

“You just had to keep fucking with me, didn’t you?” he asks Not Freddie with a sigh, and the woman shakes her head from side to side frantically in denial. “I could have dealt with your bullshit about me, honestly. But then you brought Abby into it. You put her in danger, Freddie. What’s to be done about that?”

Not Freddie jerks her head from side to side with even more conviction. “I *didn’t,”* she insists in a quavering, high-pitched voice, “I’m not!’

“You published it all,” Will accuses. He knows that this woman is not the one that he really wants to kill, knows that she is not even aware of the crimes for which she is about to be sentenced to death.

He doesn’t care.

“There’s no point in denying it,” he purrs turning to the tray of instruments that had been laid out next to the table and selecting a pocket knife with a short, though very wicked-looking, blade. “That silver tongue of yours isn’t going to be able to talk your way out of this one,” Will informs her. He brightens when the thought crosses his mind, and knows that the smile that spreads his lips wide across his face must truly be terrifying to witness, because Not Freddie devolves into great, wracking sobs at the sight of it.

He grips her jaw with a bruising tightness, forces her mouth to open wide. Hannibal appears at his side, reaching into the woman’s maw with a pair of forceps to grasp effortlessly at the flapping muscle. He leans sideways briefly to press affectionately against Hannibal in appreciation, a warm buzzing settling in his stomach when he marvels at how the two of them work together so intuitively.

She wails and thrashes against her bonds as the steel slips through her muscle, and only moments later she is coughing and choking on the blood that rushes to pool at the back of her throat. They watch silently for a moment before Hannibal speaks.

“Shall we stem the bleeding?”

Will shakes his head. “No. Let her bleed out. Toss that,” he instructs, nodding his head to the tongue that Hannibal still holds in his forceps. “But tell me what else you might want. If I don’t practice my butchering, my skills will rot away.” He drops the dripping knife to the tray and retrieves the scalpel.

He continues staring at the pale form in front of him, her movements weakening with each passing moment, but feels when Hannibal’s lips brush across his temple and then nuzzle into his curls. “What a waste that would be.”

Despite the new term beginning in January, Will’s previous forensics courses are enough to bump him into two of his classes early. As soon as he’s officially accepted into Quantico, Jack is informing Will that he’ll be joining the Forensic Pathology lecture Monday, Wednesday and Fridays and Forensic Trace Evidence Monday through Wednesday.

It’s both a blessing and a curse when Will begins his classes. While he is eternally grateful for a decent reason to get out of the house every day rather than languish about waiting for Hannibal to return, it also makes it exponentially harder to skirt Jack Crawford. Two days in a row he had to duck into a random classroom when he saw the Director turning around the corner. Two days after that, he attempts to do the same into a nearby restroom, only to have the man follow him inside.

“You’re ducking me,” he accuses before Will can even feign a surprised greeting.

“No,” Will lies too quickly. “I’ve been busy. I’m a student now, Jack.”

The dark man makes a skeptical noise. “You’re dodging my calls.”

“Reception has been spotty. I don’t have anything to tell you, Jack,” Will follows the lie with the admission before he can be called out on it. “I can’t get a read on this guy. Something is special about one of the girls, but I don’t know what. I don’t know why.” These lies, at least, come out a lot more convincingly, and when Will spots the resigned expression on Jack’s face he thinks that maybe he has slipped out of the noose once more for the time being.

“Abigail Hobbs,” Jack begins, and Will has to remind himself that turning away won’t hide his expression with a wall of mirrors right next to him.

He’s surprised and not that Jack had decided to sniff out some more info on the girl in the photo. He takes shallow breaths through his nose, urges his heart to calm its frantic tattoo, and allows one eyebrow to quirk up in response to the silence that follows the announcement. “What about her?” Will deadpans.

“She looks an awful lot like the girls gone missing, doesn’t she?”

Will meets Jack’s shrewd gaze and gives a half-hearted shrug. “I suppose. They are pretty common features, Jack. How many white men have blue eyes and dark, curly hair?”

“It goes beyond hair and eyes, and you know it. Age. Weight. Height. Will.”

Will doesn’t realize that he’s crossed his arms over his chest stubbornly and glanced away until Jack growls his name. His head swivels around to face him again at the prompt, his jaw clenched tightly as he fights the urge to snap at Jack to leave Abigail the fuck alone.

“Will, tell me you didn’t know she’s from Minnesota.”

“She never wanted to talk about home or her family,” Will shrugs, and for the most part, that’s true. “I figured she was a runaway. She’s eighteen; it didn’t cross my mind to be concerned about it.” They stand in silence for a moment; the stony expression on Jack’s face makes Will’s stomach twist unpleasantly. “Why are *you* concerned about it, Jack?”

Jack rubs a hand over his face tiredly and sighs. His shoulders drop, and Will is put even more on edge when the Director isn’t stiff and tall in front of him.

“Because Louise Hobbs just turned up dead, and Garrett Jacob Hobbs is missing.”

Hannibal has barely stepped over the threshold before Will is bolting into the kitchen, skidding to a stop before him with eyes wide, his chest working overtime as it heaves for air. “Will?”

“We have to go,” Will informs him breathlessly. “We--Garrett Jacob Hobbs is missing. Louise is dead and he’s missing, and Abigail isn’t answering her phone.”

Hannibal processes that information for a moment. He wonders vaguely how Will could know this, figures that Jack has decided to investigate Abigail after all, which led him to her family in Minnesota. He must have seen Will at the Academy, or called him into his office to demand some answers. He wonders what answers, if any, Will gave. He would like to give Will some credit, but the way he looks now...Hannibal has to suspect that he may not have been fully up to masking his emotions.

He reaches out to Will, pleased when his lover closes the rest of the distance and melts against him. “Breathe, Will,” he urges softly. He places one palm on the center of his back and skirts through Will’s tangled curls with the other in an attempt to ground him. “She’s probably stepped out for some air. Perhaps she went to town for something and neglected to bring her phone alone.”

Will squirms and pulls away at that, seemingly in no mood to be soothed. “She’s an eighteen year old girl, Hannibal. She’s not anywhere that her phone isn’t.”

“Perhaps she’s fallen asleep, and it’s on silent--”

“I’ve been calling her for *hours,”* Will snaps. “Something isn’t right. We have to *go--”*

“Alright,” Hannibal shushes as he acquiesces with a nod. “Alright, we’ll go.” He studies Will for a moment, who had stepped away to tug on his jacket as soon as he realized that he was getting his way. He shuffles in place as he waits for Hannibal, anxious and trembling. Hannibal wishes he could pull Will close, hold him and press kisses to his skin until the sour, restless terror that shivers beneath his skin is pushed out and replaced with desire, need. “Perhaps I should drive,” he suggests, and Will doesn’t argue.

The sun is setting by the time they pull onto the road that will curve up and along the bluffs, lead them to the house there. Will has never made this trip before, and he’s certain that his jostling knee, nerve-bitten fingernails and relentless inquiries as to how much longer until they arrive are driving Hannibal insane.

If they are, Hannibal is polite as ever and says nothing about it. Nor did he say anything when, twenty minutes into the drive, Will snapped at Hannibal to shut up after the man spouted off one platitude too many. He doesn’t want Hannibal to assure him that everything is fine, that there is a reasonable explanation that will reveal itself in time; he just wants Hannibal to *get him there.*

The doctor had allowed silence to reign between them for fifteen minutes before he finally switched on the radio; low, classical, soothing Will against his will. Will had reached over to claim his hand where it rested on the center console and gave it an apologetic squeeze. The corners of Hannibal’s mouth had tilted up, but his focus remained on the road. They remain that way until Will’s restless unease has him fidgeting again fifteen minutes later, and he pulls away to chew at his thumb nail.

They can see that lights are flashing ahead before they can even see how many vehicles are at the scene, and Will’s blood runs cold as the colors shift--blue, red, blue, red--in front of his eyes.

“Is that--?” he chokes, lets out a whine at Hannibal’s confirmation. “Oh, fuck, *oh, fuck--”*

They have to park at least a dozen feet down the street, for all the emergency vehicles that flood the drive and surrounding road. Three police vehicles sit flashing, along with an unmarked black SUV that Will has seen at more than one FBI crime scene. Most concerning is the ambulance that sits in the drive, lights dead and engine off.

Will knows that there’s only one reason why a responding ambulance wouldn’t bother keeping their vehicle running.

He’s out of the Bentley and tearing up the street before Hannibal can even cut the engine. He’s met on the driveway by two officers that first call out to him and then grapple him bodily to keep him from lunging himself toward the house. They are saying words to him, making demands in increasingly loud and stern voices, but Will is too busy screaming Abigail’s name to pay them any mind. He twists and breaks free from them, his feet taking

him into the house and following the trail of forensics analysts that are busy taking pictures and samples.

People are yelling at him, telling him that this is an active crime scene, that he can't be here. Will stands frozen in the entrance to the kitchen and stares at the thick, dark pool of blood that surrounds the two bodies lying on the floor.

Abigail is even more pale than usual, the red that streaks down her neck and soaks her clothes looks garishly out of place. She died with her eyes open, and stares unseeing in Will's direction until he has to look away. He can't bear to let his eyes travel down to the ruin that was made of her throat, so he turns his attention to the other body instead. He assumes this is her father, riddled with bullets and slumped down in the corner. *His* eyes Will can meet, and he glares at him as though Hobbs can still see and understand how much Will wishes he could kill him.

He doesn't fight when another set of hands finds him and pulls him back, because he knows Hannibal's hands and Hannibal's scent and the solid strength of his chest as Will is turned bodily from the kitchen and crushed against it. Arms wrap around him tightly, lips press to the shell of his ear and murmur soft commands like 'breathe' and 'don't look'. Will wonders how Hannibal can stay standing so firmly when the ground is quaking and crumbling beneath their feet--realizes then that it's only his body that is shaking with the relentless, unbearable, soul-renting sobs that are wracking through him.

Hannibal holds him until he finds his breath, finds a way to lock out the grief that threatens to swallow him, and then he's guided away, and follows Hannibal's stability like a beacon on numb feet. When he's brought outside, Hannibal urges him to sit down on the front step--off to the side so he's out of the way of the door--and tells him that he's going to get him some water.

"Kitchen's a crime scene," Will murmurs numbly in reply. Hannibal says something about a second fridge. He's not listening anymore.

It's windy on the bluffs, enough so that the chill cuts through to him, makes him aware of something outside his own heartache, and he pulls his jacket tighter around himself. He hears a familiar voice and glaces up. Down the driveway, by the black SUV, Jack stands with a police officer. He looks young, probably a rookie with the rotten luck of being the first responder to whatever call brought them here. He stares blankly ahead and nods his head occasionally as Jack speaks. He's covered in blood; it streaks across his chest, onto his face. His arms are coated in it from the elbows down; Will suspects the darkened spots over his knees are from blood soaking into his uniform.

He reaches up to wipe at his face, removing the tear but leaving another stroke of red in its wake. He tried to save her, Will realizes. He killed Hobbs--likely his first use of armed force--and then tried to stop the blood flooding from Abigail's throat. Will loves him for trying; hates him for failing.

Will looks down at his own hands. It doesn't feel right that they should be so clean when he's fairly certain he's the reason Abigail is dead.

“Are you sure you want to--”

“Just play it,” Will cuts Jack off flatly. He can feel Hannibal’s eyes on him where he sits beside him, but Will continues to stare at the desk that separates himself and the Director. Jack hesitates a moment longer and then clicks something on his computer screen.

The recording begins, slightly fuzzy with voices oversaturated--just like when the calls are played on TV. “9-1-1, what’s your emergency?”

“This is Abigail Hobbs. My dad is here,” Abigail’s voice is hushed and shaky. She was whispering, probably placing the call from another room. “I think he’s going to kill me. I think--I think he killed my mom,” her voice cracks with a small whimper then, stifled abruptly.

“Do you know where you are?”

“137 Cypress Way. Out by the bluffs.”

“I’m sending someone out to you, Abigail. Can you lock yourself in a room until they arrive?”

“I don’t know. I don’t--if he thinks something’s wrong--”

A man’s voice sounds then, muffled through the door, but clearly saying her name.

“One sec,” she responds, her voice farther from the phone but surprising nonchalant. When she returns to the line it’s only to breathe a rushed, “I have to go.”

The call disconnects. The silence it leaves in its wake is unbearably heavy. Will hears the soft creak of wood and realizes that his knuckles have gone white gripping his arm rests.

“The responding officer arrived on scene and entered the home when he heard shouting. When he got back to the kitchen he found Hobbs with a knife to his daughter’s neck. He, uh, took action when he saw the officer and was promptly put down. Greaves radioed in for help but he couldn’t stop the bleeding in time.”

Took action. Pretty way of saying he slashed open his daughter’s carotid. “There was no way for him to know where she was. How did he find her?”

Jack shifts in her chair and shoots a reluctant glance to Hannibal before he answers Will. “She called them. Two days ago. It’s in her cell phone history.”

It doesn’t make any sense to him. Will finds himself shaking his head before he can think better of it. “She was scared of him,” Will argues; Hannibal shifts beside him, but Will continues on. “The only reason we put her in that house was to get her *out* of Baltimore. To keep her *safe.* Why would she just *call* him?”

He can almost feel the air chill around them as Jack's spine straightens and he levels Will with an icy glare. "You told me you didn't know anything about Abigail Hobbs' home life."

"I fucking lied!" Will snaps right back. He pushes up from his chair so abruptly that it grates sharply against the floor as it's shoved back a few inches. "She wanted to *live."* He can tell his voice is getting louder, doesn't care enough to check it. "Why would she call?!"

"Will."

Hannibal's voice is soft but firm, a subtle command to pull his shit together. He scrubs at his face with his hands and turns away from both of them to pace the office. "I'm fine," he grits out, and then heaves a sigh.

"Let's move on to another topic," Jack suggests. "Dr. Lecter. That property of yours that Abigail Hobbs was staying at--"

"Not mine," Hannibal cuts in smoothly. "It belongs to a friend of my family, Miss Chiyoh Yoshida. She is not stateside often and has generously given me free reign to the house while she is away, in return for checking in on the property from time to time. Miss Hobbs was quite distraught when she arrived on our doorstep. I thought it would be a place where she could feel safe."

"And how much contact have *you* had with Abigail Hobbs, to find her trustworthy enough to stay in your friend's house unsupervised?"

Hannibal tells Jack about meeting Abigail at the carnival. He tells him about her staying with them in Baltimore for several days. He goes on and on about what a sweet girl she was, how good-natured, how polite.

Will leans against the door frame and tunes him out, waiting to be dismissed so he can go home and drink a fifth of whiskey. He feels his pocket buzz and retrieves his phone with half-hearted interest; after all, the only two people that would care to contact him are standing in this room. He glances at the screen and his breath catches; his heart begins beating violently against his ribcage, and for the first time since sundown, Will feels like he has a pulse again.

Because he just received a text message from Abigail Hobbs.

Chapter End Notes

Still on Tumblr.

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

A visitor helps Will work through his grief; Will decides that Hannibal needs to learn a lesson

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It's nearing midnight before they leave Quantico. Will curls up against his door and closes his eyes; pretends to be asleep so Hannibal won't talk to him. Even with very little traffic to slow them, it takes nearly two hours to get back home, and Will spends that time turning over the day's events in his mind.

He had excused himself from the office on the premise that he needed air, and was glad he did so, for the privacy was greatly appreciated as soon as he opened the message. He read it thrice and then stood outside a while longer until his tear-stained cheeks went numb from cooling in the mid-November air and his fingers grew stiff. Neither man noted his damp cheeks or red eyes when he returned, which Will appreciated, but then Jack decided to dive head-first into the entire affair from the beginning, trudging through each point and rubbing salt into the fresh wounds to Will's heart with his agonizing meticulousness. Within five minutes, Will was wishing that he had stuck out the cold just a bit longer.

Though he'd have thought it impossible, he must actually drift to sleep at some point in their drive, because the next thing Will is aware of is Hannibal leaning over him to unbuckle his seatbelt, urging him softly to rise. Will follows him from the garage to the kitchen sluggishly.

"You haven't eaten all day. Let me prepare something for you."

The concern, the desire to soothe in Hannibal's tone stings all the more because Will is fairly certain it's sincere. He can't look at him; he shakes his head and mutters something about sleep and then shuffles away to the bedroom in silence.

As soon as he enters the bathroom to prepare for bed, Will finds that he can't meet his own eyes either; terrified of the truth he will find there. He stares pointedly at the sink while he brushes his teeth for a perfunctory measure of about thirty seconds, and then strips down to his boxers and climbs into bed. They've been away all evening, so they never had a chance to get a fire going in the room before they retired. The air itself is cool, the sheets freezing as Will's naked flesh slips between them, making him instinctively curl up into a ball to seek warmth, even if it's generated by his own body.

Hannibal joins him--silently--not much later, and though Will allows him to shift close and drape himself around Will's curled form, the bed feels no less cold.

The next morning, despite their late night, Hannibal rises at his usual time to make breakfast. Will stays curled up in bed, the sleep-warm sheets bundled around him like a cocoon. When Hannibal appears to attempt to cajole Will out of his nest for a warm, hearty breakfast, Will declines. When Hannibal asks if Will would like him to cancel his patients for the day and stay with him, Will declines that as well.

He remains in bed until Hannibal leaves for his office, and then lays there some more until he passes the marks of on time, cutting it close, late for and then misses altogether his lecture for the morning. He finally summons the energy to drag himself to the bathroom to relieve his bladder (though he had half a mind to just do so in Hannibal's two-thousand thread count sheets) and retrieves the phone he'd left in his pants pocket far earlier that morning when he'd stepped out of them and into bed. He returns to his spot, tugging at the blankets until he's cocooned properly again, and then unlocks his phone.

He stares at the home screen until the phone times out and locks itself again. Then, he unlocks it and opens up his messaging app. He chews his lip as he eyes his most recent conversation thread at the top, attempts to blink away the sting in his eyes as he selects it. It's written like a letter (like a goodbye), so it spans the space of several message bubbles. Will stares at the first word, struggling to recall the way it sounded in her voice.

'Will-

I'm scheduling this to send later tonight, so by the time you get it you're probably either so pissed at me that you won't hear a single thing I have to say or I'm already gone. God, that's one of those cliches I thought I'd never run across in real life, ya know? "If you're reading this I'm already dead". Anyway, I thought, whatever the outcome, you would want to know, so I'm telling you.

After the ride out here...well, Hannibal probably told you all about our conversation. I had a lot to think about, and I decided he was right. I can't sit by and let my dad get away with this any longer, but I can't let him spend his life in prison, either. He deserves to die for what he's done. I'm going to make sure that happens. I'll do it myself if I have to, though I think I have a plan that will work just as well. I might even make it to the other side alive. If I don't, please know that I am okay with that.

Your friendship these last few months has meant the world to me, Will. I can never thank you and Hannibal enough for the kindness you've shown and the strength you've given me. Whatever happens next, I know that I'm not alone. Ever.

I love you. If I'm alive, please stop being a dick and come talk to me already.

Abigail'

Will weeps until he falls back asleep. He dreams of chasing Abigail through a funhouse at the carnival, trailing after her disembodied voice as she's always just one more corner ahead of him. When he reaches the end and crawls through the final tunnel, he finds himself in Hannibal's cellar.

He wakes again closer to noon and is finally forced to peel himself free of his (now sweat-damp) sheets when his stomach begins to rumble insistently. He's not eaten for a full day at this point and it's catching up to him, so even though the thought of food makes his gut feel heavy, Will slips on a robe and pads down to the kitchen to find something.

Hannibal left him breakfast, a mini quiche and some fresh fruit on two small cellophane-wrapped plates sitting side by side in the fridge. Will pulls them both out and sets them on the counter. He stares at them for several minutes, contemplates dumping them both in the garbage--plates and all--but finally removes the cellophane from the quiche and sticks it in the microwave. He eats the slices of kiwi and strawberries while he waits and then sits at the island and inhales the steaming egg. He burns his tongue on the first bite, continues to eat it anyways.

He contemplates washing it down with Hannibal's overpriced bourbon. He can almost see the events as they would play out, Will draining the rest of the bottle, maybe switching to a bottle or two of pretentious wine. He can see himself absolutely obliterated by the time Hannibal comes home, drunkenly assailing him with a barrage of accusations and demands (if he's still conscious at all). He considers exercising his right to leave, to make Hannibal pay for a hotel room until he feels like he can be in the same space as the other man again.

Will fears if he leaves he may never feel ready to return; fears that he would.

He's not sure with whom he's more disappointed. Hannibal must shoulder some responsibility, surely, but Will knew who Hannibal was-- *what* he was--when he agreed to all this. He knew that he was stepping into the lion's den, and entered freely and gladly, desperate to connect to another person that was like himself. He knew that it might cost him his life, in the end, but he was okay with that if it meant a moment of peace beforehand. He never thought it would cost him hers.

Hannibal is a jealous god; unable to share Will's attention even with a girl that he knew would never be a permanent fixture in their lives. He knew what she meant to Will, though, and he had to play his games regardless, tug on the strings and make everyone around him dance like the puppets they are. Perhaps he had only intended to manipulate her as he had Will, see how far she would go, if she would kill her own father simply because Hannibal suggested it (and as roundabout as it might have been, Will knows that Hannibal *did* suggest it, in some fashion). Perhaps he hadn't meant for Abigail's follow through (if he'd anticipated it at all) to end with her lying in a pool of her own blood, bleeding out, scared and frantic and *alone.*

But it had.

Will washes his dishes and sets them to dry in the rack when he's done and then shuffles back upstairs. He pauses in the doorway, contemplates climbing back into bed, reaching for blissful unconsciousness once more; he moves to the ensuite instead.

The tub feels too large without Hannibal's body to cradle his own, and he has no idea how much of the scented oils Hannibal ever puts in there, so the water feels flat and bland. When he leans back, he's met with cold, hard porcelain rather than a warm, furred chest. Being in a mindset where Will is not sure he can even *look* at Hannibal, he hates that it feels like he

can't properly bathe without him. The hot water feels nice, pushes out the last of the chill that had seeped deep into his bones, but does little to relax his muscles.

"That has got to be the *worst* attempt at a bath that I've ever seen. You're stiffer than when you went in!"

Will startles at her voice, accidentally submerges and flounders for a moment before he pushes his upper half out of the water. He pushes his sodden curls out of his eyes, even though he's almost afraid to look. He's afraid that she'll look how she did before; clothes soaked in blood, her throat a gaping ruin, her eyes dull and lifeless. In the end, he can't not, because he doesn't know if he'll ever see her again. Abigail is sitting on vanity across the room from the tub, her fingers wrapped around the edge of the counter and her legs swinging freely. She's wearing her olive green shorts and a white tank top that says 'SORRY I'M LATE, I DIDN'T WANT TO COME' that he'd seen her wear so many times on the road. Will's hands immediately move to cover himself.

Abigail laughs at that, but the sound is hollow, not echoed by their tiled surroundings. "You don't have to play modest with me, Will. I'm dead. And in any case, I'm not interested in looking, so…" she trails off with a shrug, brings one hand up to examine her fingernails as if to make her point.

"Abigail…" Will whispers, because he's fairly certain his voice will break if he tries for anything more substantial than that. "I'm sorry."

Her blue eyes dart up to meet his, one thin, dark eyebrow quirking up in interest. "For what?"

"If you hadn't become my friend, you wouldn't have died."

She actually *snorts* at that, and then gives him a reproachful look. "Hey, idiot. Remember the part where my own father was killing a bunch of girls in my stead? You know, the one that *actually* slit my throat when he had the chance? How could you *possibly* think this was your fault?"

"Hannibal tricked you," Will argues, even though he's pretty sure his heart actually *breaks* when he says it out loud. "It wasn't your decision to call him, to try to kill him. Hannibal only made you think it was. He...he does that. He's manipulative."

She tips her head up and studies him, the ghost of a smile on her pink lips when she replies, "Yeah. And you love him anyway."

Will drops her gaze then, ashamed. "I thought I did," he admits. "I don't know how I could now."

She's silent until he dares to peek up at her again, and her smile grows, flashes her teeth. "You love him *more* now. Not less."

He might have been able to ignore the choked sob that spilled from his mouth if it hadn't echoed off the walls all around him afterwards. He sits up fully, wraps his arms around his knees and curls over to bury his face in the only shelter he has. "How is that possible?"

“Because you know why he did it.”

“Why?” he asks from the safety of his nook. When he’s met with more silence, he finds the will to raise his head again. “Abigail?”

He’s alone once more.

It’s not the first time Hannibal has found himself with less than his full attention in his patients for the day--not even, in fact, the first time that Will has been the subject of his distraction. But today he finds that it grates on his nerves just a little more insistently. Everything does. He’s been irritated with his patients at certain points, absolutely, but he’s never felt the urge to snap at them to get over themselves, to ask them if they realize that perhaps the people around them are dealing with their own crises as well.

He remains stoic, though, despite all this, his disposition just barely on the right side of warm. He feigns concern where concern is necessary, support when he must. All the while, he thinks of Will.

He has certainly been in a state since the evening before, though Hannibal can’t fault him too much for that. He is concerned at his lack of interest in food, and wonders often if he ever made it to the kitchen to eat his breakfast. He doubts greatly that Will would have gone to class, far more likely to find comfort in a bottle than attempting to throw himself back into routine. He wonders as to what state he will find Will in when he returns home.

He expects to find Will either drunk or still in bed--perhaps both, if he’s honest with himself. He does *not* expect to find Will in the kitchen when he arrives home, nor does he expect to see him *cooking.* But the evidence converges on his every sense; the spitting hiss of frying oil, the scent of fish and crisping potatoes, and Will, standing in front of a frying pan, looking as casual as if he does this every day.

Will tosses a warm smile over his shoulder as he enters, and Hannibal has to pause for a moment in an attempt to decide if it was more likely that he has accidentally strolled into an alternate universe or if Will has finally gone mad.

“You’re right on time,” Will informs him as he turns back to the stovetop and prods at the fish lying in the frying pan before him. “We’ve got about…” he glances over to the oven, where a timer is counting down to the completion of another component, “Ten minutes left.”

Hannibal makes his way over to his lover, peering into the oven as he passes. “You’re making chips,” he states in surprise. Even with most of his body turned away, Hannibal can see Will’s cheek dimple in a smile.

“What else would I make for a fish fry?” he asks, tips his head into the kiss that Hannibal plants against his temple. “Well, I considered hushpuppies. But I thought two foods fried in oil might offend your delicate sensibilities.”

Hannibal lets the snark pass without remark, thrilled to have found his partner in such high spirits. His hands find Will's sharp hips and cradles them, his lips trailing down Will's neck to nuzzle into his shoulder. "Can I offer my assistance in any way?"

"Set the table?" Will requests, and Hannibal acquiesces with a nod, pressing one more kiss to the crook of his neck before he pulls away. "I got a sauvignon blanc into a decanter earlier, if you want to pour for us," Will adds as he retrieves their cutlery.

He readies the table and then pours their wine, bringing both glasses with him back into the kitchen. He takes up residence at the counter next to Will and passes his glass over to him; Will accepts it with a hum of gratitude, taking a generous sip and flipping the filets over in one graceful swoop.

He must feel Hannibal's gaze upon him, for Will's lips quirk up into a smirk as he takes another sip of wine. "It's been awhile, but some things you just don't forget." He turns toward Hannibal suddenly, the relaxed, mirthful countenance melting away entirely for a breath as he meets Hannibal's gaze. "I don't want to talk about it," he states plainly, firmly. "Not tonight." And just like that, his attention is back on the fish, his frame lax and movements casual.

Hannibal doesn't press the matter, and retrieves the plates when Will asks for them.

Abigail never returned after she left Will in the bathtub, and Will had spent the rest of the afternoon turning over what she had said in his mind. In the end, he decides to push everything aside for one night. He just needs *one* night, where everything is normal and easy, where they can drink and eat and laugh and fuck. Just one more, and then tomorrow…

He pulls himself back to the present, filled with a sick certainty that if his mind lingers anywhere else for too long, Hannibal will know. His lips tilt up in a lazy smile as he drains the last of the wine from his glass--his third--and presses his foot forward under the table to brush against Hannibal's ankle.

"Can we not tonight?" he asks, when Hannibal suggests taking a nightcap in the study. "Just forget the nightcap and the dishes...can you just take me upstairs and make love to me?"

"Anything you want, Will," Hannibal promises on a breath, and it sets both a heat and a sickening weight into Will's stomach because he's pretty sure that Hannibal means it.

They undress each other slowly, with purpose, and it may be one of the few times that Will can recall the two of them not being absolutely engulfed in frantic desire. Hannibal's lips find the hollow of Will's throat as soon as he frees the top button of his shirt, just to press one chaste kiss there before turning his lips back to Will's. They kiss long and slow and deep, fingers idly tugging open buttons and pushing away fabric. When shirts have been shed and they begin working on belts and flies, Hannibal's mouth shifts its attention to Will's shoulders, his chest. His kisses are wet, open-mouthed and gentle; nothing like the primal urge to bite and mark that usually overcomes him.

Will lets his hands glide down the planes of Hannibal's hard body as Hannibal's lips explore him lazily; spreading across broad shoulders and trailing down his firm biceps, light fingers dancing down his ribs until he reaches Hannibal's slim hips and then circles around to palm the meat of his ass--firm, like the rest of him. Sometimes Will wonders if Hannibal is anything more than a marble statue encased in a fine layer of human flesh. His attention to Hannibal's rear shifts their hips, causes their thick, swollen cocks to brush together, and all at once the both of them seem to decide that it's time to be horizontal.

When they move, they move as one, stepping forwards and backwards in tandem with the shared goal of making it to the bed, and they somehow manage to clamber onto it and stretch out together while remaining wholly glued together, as though parting weren't an option.

Lying down, Hannibal's mouth has greater access to Will's body, and he takes advantage of that fact immediately. His lips and tongue trail down his torso, lathing him with tender licks where he had once snagged with teeth and marked. His hands follow the path of his mouth, soft caresses, as though Will is something precious and delicate. Will sinks back into the mattress and enjoys it, eyes closed and head tipping back as he breathes out a sigh.

When Hannibal reaches his groin, he licks one hot stripe up the length of Will's achingly hard cock and then seemingly decides to bypass the area altogether, his mouth trailing lower to suck a soft kiss to his inner thigh and then spreading his legs further apart to lathe his attention upon Will's hole. Will's body jerks at the sensation--the first press of Hannibal's tongue against him always makes him twitch--and then immediately tilts his hips in encouragement, attempting to press closer as Hannibal draws a moan from Will's throat by spearing his tongue into him. Hannibal has always enjoyed preparing Will this way, always enjoyed teasing him and making him tremble. No matter how heated or desperate their joining began, Hannibal would always take his time there. Will doesn't think it's necessarily for his benefit, many times they have forgone preparation altogether and he has forced himself into Will, splitting him open and making Will shriek in both pain and pleasure.

Now that they are moving at a languid pace, Hannibal not only lingers between Will's legs, but seemingly decides to set up shop down there. Several minutes tick by that see Will groaning and writhing, grinding down to meet Hannibal's lips and tongues and he laps and sucks and presses into him. Will's cock leaks copiously across his stomach, so much so that when Hannibal finally adds a finger to his tongue's ministrations and Will bucks his hips down to encourage it deeper, some of his precome slips from the pooling mess of his stomach and trails down the side of his body to meet the bed. He's all but lost sense of time when Hannibal finally adds a second finger, scissoring and stroking and then finally, *finally,* reaching deeper and curling up to press against his prostate.

Will comes with a sob and a curse, clawing at the sheets around him as his body convulses around Hannibal's digits. "Fuck me, fuck me," he begs, even as his release is still pulsing from him. He knows that it will be too much now, with his every nerve already alight with burning, tingling pleasure, almost too much to bear. He wants it even more.

He grabs at Hannibal's hair, his shoulders, urging him back up his body. Hannibal must know that Will doesn't intend to let him pull away for a single second, so he doesn't even attempt to retrieve the lube; instead, he spits in his hand and slicks up his cock before he guides it to

Will's overstimulated hole. Will cries out again as Hannibal pushes inside and is promptly silenced by Hannibal's tongue licking into his mouth. Will has long since dropped the reservation of kissing Hannibal after being eaten out and surges upward to deepen the kiss, latch around Hannibal's tongue and *suck*.

When he's buried to the hilt inside Will, Hannibal breaks the kiss with a soft groan. Will peers up at him, reaches up to brush away the hair hanging down into Hannibal's eyes. Hannibal gazes back at him, an expression of fondness so heartbreakingly tender on his face that Will's throat feels thick. He's afraid that Hannibal is going to say something, exactly the wrong thing, so Will wraps his legs around Hannibal, digging his heels into Hannibal's ass in an attempt to pull him closer and shifts his hips to remind him that there's a job he should be doing. Hannibal flashes him a wry smile and then moves his hips, pulling almost completely from Will and then sinking back into him, steady and slow.

He keeps that pace, sliding in and out of Will with languid intent. When Will feels like he can no longer bear to keep Hannibal's earnest gaze, he closes his eyes, and then the kissing begins. Hannibal's soft lips brush across his forehead, first, and then, ever-so-gently, over both of his closed eyes. The edge of his cheekbone, directly over his ear, the corner of his jaw--Hannibal maps out his face with his lips like a blind man would with his hands.

Hannibal's hands are too busy for such a thing; his fingers card through Will's damp curls, brush down his neck. His nails drag across Will's ribs, the pressure only great enough to sense, not mark or inflict pain. One hand cradles Will's jaw while the other brushes a thumb over his nipple as it travels down, down, to where Will is already swelling between them once again. Then it encircles his length and, for a few long minutes, does nothing more than hold it gently as more and more blood begins to pulse into him and he hardens in earnest. Then his hand moves, matches the rhythm of his hips as he rolls deeper and deeper into Will.

He can feel when Hannibal is close, feels his stomach tense where Will's thighs wrap around him, hears the way his breathing grows ever more ragged. His kisses cease, lips hovering just over Will's as they pass air between them from one sigh and gasp to the next. When he spills, Will spills with him, moaning out his ecstasy as Hannibal's hips continue to rock forward, push his hot seed deeper and deeper into him.

Will couldn't even say how long they remain that way, though it's long enough that Hannibal's cock grows soft within him; they are all panting breaths and shivering tremors. Eventually, he opens his eyes. That fond look on Hannibal's face has only intensified in the aftermath of his orgasm, the hand that cradles his face stroking his cheek softly.

"I love you, Will."

Will's stomach turns sour, his chest growing tighter with each breath he attempts to take in. There are a multitude of responses Will could give to that, and none of them are what Hannibal wants to hear at that moment.

He wants to ask why. Why do you love me? Why did you do that if you love me? Why do you continue to pretend that I'm your partner and then play with me like a puppet?

He reaches up to brush the hair from Hannibal's eyes once again, forcing his lips to turn upwards, even just a little. At least one half of his mouth obeys. "Say that to me again sometime, when you didn't just blow your load inside me."

Hannibal huffs a soft laugh and leans forward to press their lips together. "My reason for saying it was not simply post-orgasm bliss, though that might have loosened my tongue. But, as you wish," he presses another kiss to Will's lips and then pulls away. When he climbs off of the bed, Will isn't worried about having offended him, knowing that he will be returning shortly with a warm cloth to clean him up.

Will lies in bed and wonders how he will respond the next time Hannibal says it to him. Wonders if he'll even get the chance.

Will isn't beside him when Hannibal wakes, which is odd, because unless he is plagued by nightmares, Will is notorious for burrowing into the blankets and staying in bed for far longer than he should. Hannibal would know if Will had had a Bad Night, because his tossing and turning, frequent jolting awake with a gasp, *always* wakes Hannibal in the night. As would any alarm he had set.

Which means, as far as Hannibal can tell, Will never went to sleep the previous night. He must have laid in bed, controlled his breathing and heart rate and feigned sleep until Hannibal himself succumbed to it. He hadn't considered that Will was skilled enough to do so, but it's not the first time the younger man has pleasantly surprised him. If he were any other person, his first thought would be one of concern, equating the way Will responded to his declaration the night before with his having not slept and now being absent from bed. Hannibal is not any other person.

He rises without concern--though, admittedly, buzzing with mild curiosity--and makes his way downstairs. His hope had been that Will had risen early to see to the dishes that they left from dinner, though when Hannibal enters the kitchen to see that is not the case, he must admit that it doesn't surprise him in the least. A glance into the garage shows the Volvo absent.

Will had left a note before, when he'd risen at dawn and gone for a walk, even when he had been furious with Hannibal. He sees no note now. He considers texting or calling Will and then dismisses it, turning his attention to the dishes. Will will return, in time, and even if it takes all day, Hannibal has no patients to see to, so he will be there when he does.

He tends first to the neglected dishes, pots and pans. Will still hasn't arrived home by the time he's done, but he begins breakfast anyways. A protein scramble will keep well enough for awhile and reheat just fine later on, so Hannibal begins frying up sausage and peppers. He's just begun scrambling the eggs when he hears the groaning of the garage door and the rumble of the Volvo's engine herald Will's arrival.

"Good morning," he greets Will as he enters from the garage, unable to stem the small smile that curls his lips at his lover's fortuitous timing. "Where were you off to so early this morning?"

Will doesn't seem surprised to find Hannibal in the kitchen. He removes his jacket and then walks around him to the fridge, though his fingers skim across Hannibal's low back as he passes. "I had to go to Quantico."

Hannibal pushes the eggs around with a spatula. "Did he have more questions about Abigail?" Will grunts a dismissive sound as he pours himself a glass of orange juice. Hannibal frowns at that, irritation coiling through him. "Surely he doesn't already have another case for you."

"No, no," Will waves off, taking another sip of juice and leaning against the counter. "I called the meeting." Hannibal makes an inquisitive sound and Will lets out a low chuckle. "Oh, I, uh, I told him you're the Chesapeake Ripper."

There aren't many things that could make Hannibal's blood run cold, but that one certainly does the trick. He freezes, his spatula buried in the soft yellow fluff of eggs. After a moment, he sets the spatula down, snaps the heat to the burner off, and turns toward Will. "Now why would you do something like that?"

Will's eyes are practically sparkling at Hannibal's discomfort, his plush lips twisting into a cruel smile that Hannibal has before only seen reserved for his victims. It falters under Hannibal's full attention, his eyes dimming and expression going flat. "What did you say to Abigail?" When Hannibal only studies him silently, Will clarifies, "Your drive out to the house, Hannibal. What did you say?"

"She was quiet, nervous, for a good amount of that drive," Hannibal divulges. Will stares at him. "We did discuss her father, briefly. I suspected that Abigail did not want her father put in prison because she wished him dead even more. Something that she confirmed for me quite readily."

Will stares back at him, a single brow quirking up as though he is waiting for something in particular.

"I suggested that it might be therapeutic for her to take his life herself."

Will nods, huffing a sardonic laugh. *"There* it is," he snarls, that cruel smile taking residence upon his lips once more. "That's what stuck with her. What made her decide to call her father to her in hopes that she could end her nightmare, whether she survived or not."

"And how did Agent Crawford respond when you told him his colleague and friend was the very same monster that he has hunted fruitlessly for years? More than a little skeptical, I'm sure."

Will nods around another swallow of orange juice. "Oh, yeah, for sure. Though I'm thinking that the the meat sample I brought the lab will come back human within an hour or so. That should probably clear up any doubts."

Hannibal can't hold back his snarl, taking a heated step toward Will. *"Why?"*

Will snarls right back, closing the distance between them by another step. “For the same reason that you manipulated Abigail into getting herself killed,” Will growls, a wolfish grin twisting his lips and flashing his teeth. He prowls forward, staring Hannibal down, though when he speaks again, his voice is a rolling purr. “I told you this goes both ways, Hannibal. If *I* can’t have anything in my life that isn’t *you,* then *you* can’t have anything that isn’t *me.”* He comes to stand just before him, head tilted up to keep his gaze in a challenge. “Quid pro quo.”

Hannibal’s hand is buried in Will’s curls before the younger man can even think to flinch back; his grasp tightens there as he uses his leverage over him to draw their faces closer together. Will’s mouth falls open in pain, though he refuses to make a sound, and Hannibal can’t help but dip his tongue inside to lick behind Will’s teeth, can’t stop the smile that twists his lips as the rest of Will’s body voluntarily shifts closer still.

“Vicious, vindictive thing,” Hannibal chides against his lips, “I love you.”

Will moans into the kiss, head spinning and heart pounding and the rest of his body going numb as he struggles to process Hannibal’s words. His second declaration, uttered not during the heat of coitus, but in a situation where Hannibal could have just as easily snapped his neck for the inconvenience he’s just caused.

This time, Will believes him.

Distantly, he can hear a shatter, feels cold liquid splash against the cuff of his pants as his hand releases its grip on his glass of juice to find its home in Hannibal’s hair, the other to his shoulder urging him *closer,* for *more.* His lover acquiesces without hesitation, twisting them so that Will’s back is to the counter, crowding into his space to grind their hips together with brutal force. Will is pushed back with each motion, his spine arching as his low back meets the unforgiving edge of the counter.

It takes about every ounce of self-control he possesses to move his hands to Hannibal’s broad chest and urge him back, even more to pull his lips away from Hannibal’s. “We keep this up,” he pants, making a monumental effort to ignore the evidence of Hannibal’s arousal pressed against him, “we’re still gonna be fucking when the cops come calling.”

Hannibal hums, a disapproving sound, but pulls away nonetheless. Will trails after him, following him to the bedroom and then the walk-in closet, where he leans against the door jam and watches as Hannibal reveals a safe hidden in the far wall. He watches with interest as Hannibal retrieves two passports and two leather wallets, one black, one brown.

He returns to Will, pushing the items into his hands. “Perhaps you could help expedite the process and get our tickets booked? First flight out to Paris--first class, if at all possible. Use these names.”

Will opens one of the passports. “Ulrich Hemmings,” he notes out loud, opens the other and freezes for a moment at the sight of his own face, “and William Moore. You had this ready for me?” His throat feels thick at the thought. He gives the wallets a cursory examination--

driver's licenses and credit cards present to match each identity--and then turns his gaze to Hannibal, who is busy changing into one of his more subdued suits of black and grey.

"With hobbies like ours, disaster becomes an inevitability rather than a possibility." He pauses when he gets the last button of his waistcoat secured, turning toward Will fully. "I would never leave without you, Will."

Will's chest swells at that, a warmth that he hasn't felt for the last two days pulsing through him. "I thought you'd be pretty mad at me."

Hannibal's lips twitch as he finishes tightening his tie. He strides over to where Will stands and slips a hand through Will's curls. Will can't stop his eyes from fluttering shut at the sensation. Hannibal's lips meet his temple and then drag down to his ear. "Rest assured, we will be discussing impulsive and impetuous decisions, as well as the consequences they bring, in due time. For now, be a good boy and book the tickets, hm?"

Will shudders, his cock twitching insistently as if to remind him that it still exists and is still entirely too turned on for this situation. "Yes, Daddy," he breathes.

Will has never flown before--never had reason to, when his father was around, and then any traveling he had done with the company had been in his old man's time-worn truck and then, when that finally failed him, Will's trusty Volvo. The seats are spacious in first class, at least, and Hannibal holds his hand when Will's eyes slip shut as his body vibrates with the plane's take-off. When the attendant comes around, Hannibal accepts two flutes of champagne from her and passes one to Will.

"Here begins a new life," Hannibal murmurs, tipping his flute to tap gently against Will's own. Will's stomach flutters as he recognizes the poem that Hannibal references--can't not, having reread that particular text message often as he awaited returning to Baltimore. "To us."

"Just us," Will corrects, intent to make it clear to Hannibal that he had been entirely serious before. With Hannibal exposed in America and Will having no reason to return, all they have now are each other and the possibilities before them. No obligations, no distractions. Will, as it turns out, is just as jealous a god as Hannibal.

"Just us," Hannibal agrees with a soft smile. He takes a sip of his champagne and reaches over to clasp Will's hand once more.

Chapter End Notes

And that's that. I can't thank everyone enough for coming along for the ride with me! Your time and support, comments, kudos and bookmarks mean the world to me!

I have a few other projects in the works right now, though I'm holding off on posting until closer to completion so I don't make you guys wait ages between chapters! But, if you are interested and haven't already, feel free to subscribe to my profile to get updates on any of my new work! I also announce all of my postings on Tumblr as well, if you prefer to follow me there.

Thank you again! I love my Fannibal Family! <3

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